Email from Secretary Wetzel (10/18/2017)

Earlier today (10/18/2017), at the direction of Governor Tom Wolf, the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole (PBPP) and the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (DOC) agreed to pursue a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) consolidating all functions other than the decision-making of the Board, the Sexual Offender Assessment Board and the Office of the Victim Advocate. The Administrative Code authorizes commonwealth agencies to enter into agreements for cooperation and coordination of work, the elimination of duplicating and overlapping of functions and allows the respective parties to share in the use of employees, land, buildings, facilities and equipment. 71 P.S. § 181.

This consolidation has been a long time coming and we are excited for the potential of the combined agencies as it relates to public safety in Pennsylvania. While for all involved, the unknown often creates angst, we are confident that together we will be a stronger and better criminal justice agency.

The goal remains the same, to continue to improve public safety for Pennsylvanians by having people leave our custody less likely to commit a crime than when they came to us. This consolidation allows us to reallocate redundant and wasted resources to enhance field supervision, recognizing the challenges presented with nearly 20,000 individuals with a criminal history reentering society each year. Over the past decade we've seen a significant increase in individuals with mental illness, addictions, and those involved in security threat groups/gangs. These challenging populations require both intensive programs inside prison, coupled with smart and effective strategies while under supervision. It is only through this combination that we can achieve our goal of less crime and fewer victims.

While we are clear on the direction and the purpose, what does this mean to you in how your work and lives will be affected along with the impact on our population?

- Under the MOU, both agencies – the PA DOC and the PBPP – will remain separate entities; however, the community supervision of parolees and all other reentry services will be combined under a new, centralized chain of command for those respective staff, reporting up through the Secretary of Corrections.

- To achieve that in the most effective way, a new table of organization will exist where the prison operation/management will be the responsibility of Chief Deputy Secretary for Institutional Operations Tabb Bickell, who has been in a similar role. George Little, who presently serves as the Director of the DOC's Bureau of Community Corrections and was previously Commissioner of Corrections for the state of TN, will serve as Chief Deputy Secretary for Community Operations and Supervision.

- DOC and PBPP personnel affected by the new organizational structure will fall within its direct supervision, but shall remain employees of their respective agencies. Employees will continue fulfilling the duties and responsibilities of their respective agencies, and there will be no changes in salaries or collective bargaining agreements.

- We will build upon what we have learned through the previous consolidations as this MOU also consolidates the agencies' business administration offices, internal affairs and investigative offices as well as auditing. The communications/public information offices will also be consolidated. The MOUs that DOC and PBPP had previously entered to consolidate information technology, management of data and research functions will continue and are not affected by this MOU.

- The Board, including the Office of the Board Secretary, the Hearing Examiner’s Office, the Office of the Victim Advocate and Sexual Offenders Assessment Board will continue to operate independently. The Parole Board will continue to exercise its exclusive and independent decision-making role with regard to decisions to parole, re-parole, commit and recommit for violations of parole.
It is important to provide the opportunity for ideas to be shared and acted upon. You continue to be the most important and valued resource we have within our agencies and are pivotal for our joint success, and in that spirit:

• additional information will be shared regarding the creation of committees comprised of staff, without regard to rank or agency, with a desire to participate in the consolidation efforts;

• a steering committee will be established to manage the effort; and,

• any questions regarding the consolidation can be sent to ra-crdocpbppunificat@pa.gov

NEXT STEPS

Next Monday, October 23, leadership from both agencies will meet at the Training Academy to begin the process of consolidating operations. This will be followed by focus groups/listening sessions with field and institutional staff. The outcome of these two initiatives will lead to the formation of several committees to ensure we structure processes in a manner that makes sense both operationally and financially. We strongly encourage anyone, of any rank or experience level, to participate in this process and help us shape what the future for our new and consolidated agency looks like.

No doubt, we will encounter issues during this transitional period; however, we will work together to address them as they rise and resolve them with the best possible solutions for the task and the achievement that lies before us. Transparency and communication are and will be the two guiding principles throughout this process. Thank you for the work that you do every day and we look forward to becoming an even more effective agency combined, while maintaining our role as the leader of criminal justice in America.