

GOVERNOR ROBERT P. CASEY  
STATEMENT ON CAMP HILL STATE PRISON  
OCTOBER 28, 1989

These have been difficult days for all of us. My overriding concern was the safety of the hostages and the safety of the public. Thank God the Department of Corrections continues to confirm no loss of life in this tragic incident. And we must note with pride that, because of the many dedicated state and local law enforcement professionals, volunteer firemen and other volunteers, the injured were cared for and the prison fences never breached or threatened.

I have always had great respect for police officers, volunteer firemen and other emergency volunteers. But my respect and admiration was only increased by the unselfish dedication of the men and women who, sometimes at the risk of their own lives, contributed so much to bringing the Camp Hill emergency to an end. Without such professionalism and teamwork, that conclusion could easily have been very different.

I especially want to thank David Owens, Commissioner of Corrections, and the personnel of the Department of Corrections, Colonel Ronald Sharpe and the Pennsylvania State Police; local police and firefighters, medical and hospital personnel, and all the other unsung men and women who came forward and served so tirelessly and so well.

I also want to thank the many other state employees, including those on my staff who worked with great dedication, literally around the clock, during this incident. They made it possible for me to be in communication with those in charge of the Camp Hill situation on a minute-to-minute basis.

This allowed me to fulfill my responsibilities, while following the strong recommendation of experienced corrections and police officers not to publicly insert myself into the situation.

As you are all aware, the inmates had access to TV and radio, and a constant concern was how they might react to actions reported to be occurring around them.

Yesterday morning I said our hearts go out in gratitude and compassion, to the hostages and their families who have endured this painful ordeal, as well as to those who have been injured. I repeat that again today.

And now we go forward. We must find an answer to the question: "How did this happen?"

We must identify and punish those inmates whose criminal acts destroyed property and put innocent lives in danger.

We must promptly craft a plan to replace the lost prison cell capacity at Camp Hill and provide additional cell space throughout our state correctional system on as fast a track as possible.

We must relieve the pressure placed on already overcrowded facilities by the temporary relocation of the Camp Hill prisoners.

We must immediately determine how many additional correction officers will be required by the overcrowding emergency which has resulted from this incident. We must provide them on a priority basis, while also providing further complements of correction officers as the needs of an expanding system require.

The General Assembly must promptly enact the earned time legislation which I, along with others, have already endorsed. And we must consider other ideas designed to reduce the kind of prison overcrowding which prevails not only here in Pennsylvania, but across our nation.

To accomplish these objectives I am today announcing the following actions:

1. I will appoint promptly an independent commission to determine fairly and objectively how this tragic happen? How did the situation get out of control on Wednesday? And more importantly, how did it happen again on Thursday? And most importantly, how do we prevent this from happening again.

This commission should also examine the response on the part of the Department of Corrections and the State Police which was ultimately successful in bringing the situation to a conclusion without the loss of human life.

It's my judgement that given these unusual circumstances, I need the findings and recommendations of an outside, independent commission as the best tool to provide answers to these serious questions; to assure the public that these questions are answered with fairness and objectivity; and to decide what follow-up action is necessary.

2. A full-scale criminal investigation already begun by the State Police will be carried forward to identify those inmates who committed criminal acts so they will be prosecuted and punished.

3. I have today directed that a replacement plan for the lost prison cell capacity at Camp Hill be drafted and recommendations made to me as soon as possible.

4. I've also directed an immediate review of the need for additional corrections officers in the state system, with recommendations to be provided to me as soon as possible.

5. I've today spoken U.S. Senator Arlen Specter, who has suggested that the inmates from Camp Hill might be moved to the new federal prison at Bradford, McKean County. I told him we appreciate his generous offer and he has agreed to urge federal corrections officials to allow us of the facility. I also spoke with Senator John Heinz, who has agreed to take similar action.

6. I'm today directing all of the involved departments of state government to accelerate the plans and proposals we have already made for new prison construction and the provision of additional corrections officers in the state system.

The Commonwealth has already invested more than \$203.7 million to make a substantial capital investment in prison expansion over the past three years.

In January 1987 the Commonwealth has 11,048 prison cells. From that time until March of this year, we opened four new prisons -- Cresson, Frackville, Retreat and Smithfield. This expanded our capacity by over 2,000 cells at a cost of \$120.6 million.

During that same period of time, we expanded the Graterford Correctional Institution by more than 400 cells at a cost of \$46.7 million.

Earlier this year, I authorized another \$24.4 million in construction to add 536 cells at four existing institutions -- Smithfield, Greensburg, Retreat and Rockview.

Our PENNFREE anti-drug program provides \$12 million in funding for the fast-track conversion of Farview State Hospital into a state prison. The conversion will provide another 1,000 cells to our system within the next few months.

We budgeted some \$50 million for a new 650-cell institution in southeastern Pennsylvania solely for use by inmates who are drug and alcohol abusers.

Finally, I've proposed the construction of a new 1,000 cell maximum security institution at a cost of \$86 million.

In sum, the expansion that's been completed, is now underway or planned, will add more than 5,600 cells to the state prison system.

On the staffing side, the Commonwealth's commitment has also grown substantially. Total personnel costs to staff the state prison system statewide have increased 28 percent since 1987-88.

We now pay about \$218 million a year on prison personnel in our state.

We've provided funding in the current budget for 4,226 guards systemwide. That's 33 percent more than the 3,167 correctional officers who were on the job just two years ago.

We've also added 269 people to the number of authorized support staff in the Bureau of Corrections over the past three years.

6. I am directing today that a renewed effort be undertaken to obtain passage of the earned time legislation now pending in the General Assembly and I'm directing my staff to review other ideas and legislative proposals which have as their purpose the reduction of prison overcrowding, provided they present no threat to the safety of the public.

To do all this, I ask the support and the help not only of our General Assembly and local elected officials, but the people of Pennsylvania. Working together, we will meet this challenge.

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