

Marty Aubel Testimony

Chairman Argall, Chairman Boscola, Chairman Greenleaf, Chairman Leach and members of the Democrat and Republican Policy Committees and the Senate Judiciary Committee.

I served the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections as Deputy Superintendent of Facility Management and Centralized Services at SCI Mercer for three years and I retired in December of 2012. Previously I had been Deputy Superintendent at SCI Cambridge Springs and Major at SCI Albion. I began my career in corrections at SCI Graterford.

The facility at SCI Mercer at the time of my retirement was a very modern correction facility. It had undergone major improvements and a very new addition was made to the facility enhancing the entrance and administration buildings. The Control Center was automated and the facility added an extra fence. A new and very secure armory was also constructed at this time. The Perimeter Intrusion Defense system at the facility was enhanced to enable the facility to house multiple custody levels to include Custody Level's 3, 4, and 5 and indeed the facility did house these levels of inmates. Microwave detections and a taught wire system were added to the intrusion system as well as new sally port and advanced cameras were placed along the the perimeter. Two new "Butterfly" units were constructed each housing 250 inmates. These units were designed specifically to keep the facility secure and to enable the minimal amount of staff to operate the unit securely.

During the time I worked at SCI Mercer, there were no major incidents at the facility and no major assault of staff, assault on inmates or any security breach of the facility. This was due in no small part to the excellent and well trained staff and management at the facility. The staff at SCI Mercer, were on the whole very professional and interacted very well with the inmates they supervised. They take their jobs and mission very seriously.

SCI Mercer has always passed ACA Accreditation with high numbers getting 100% of their mandatories and 98% or higher of their non mandatory standards. The facility is very clean and its grounds are well maintained. SCI Mercer currently has a Food Service Department that is one of the best in the state and one that has been emulated by other facilities. The Health Care at SCI Mercer has always been outstanding. The facility uses Sharon General Hospital, UPMC Horizon and Grove City Hospital for outside care. Medical costs at these hospitals are on the whole less costly and rival that of Geisinger Medical System in the Central and Eastern Part of the state. The institution also has psychology staff at the facility who have done an excellent job in working with the mental health concerns of the inmates housed in facility. The Unit Management team of security staff and counselors work very closely together as a team to promote the

stability of the facility. There are also Therapeutic Communities within the facility that work closely with drug and alcohol offenders to insure their programming is met and to address their issues to help reduce recidivism in the facility. All of these staff working as a team is one of the main reasons this facility operates as the lowest cost per inmate in the entire state.

The facility is situated in a very unique location. It is right at the intersection of Interstate 79 and Interstate 80. This places the facility at the intersection of two main highways. I-79 travels North and South of this country and I-80 travels east and west. It is situated in close proximity to the Communities of Sharon, Pennsylvania, Mercer Pennsylvania, Greenville, Pennsylvania and Grove City, Pennsylvania. It is a few short hours from Pittsburgh, Pa to the south and Erie, Pennsylvania to the north. The facility is highly accessible from all areas of the state making transportation into and out of the facility a non issue. Unlike many of the facilities in the state which are located in a very rural area and off of the main highways, this facility is in both a rural and urban environment and situated very on two main highways. The location of this facility alone should be a valuable asset for the Pa DOC as it strives to transport inmates across the state in the most secure manner.

The staff who are employed at SCI Mercer reside in the local communities that surround the facility. Many of them live within 14 miles of the facility. All of them have dedicated their lives to working for SCI Mercer and the Department of Corrections. The closest facilities to SCI Mercer would be SCI Albion and SCI Cambridge Springs which are approximately 60 miles away. SCI Pittsburgh would also be about 65 miles away and SCI Forrest the next closest is a considerable distance. Closing the facility would undoubtedly cause great hardship and disruption to the family life of these dedicated employees.

This is not an antiquated facility that is located in an out of the way location. This is one of the most modern facilities in the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections. The major upgrades at this facility are much more recent than that of the prototypical units constructed after the Camp Hill Riots. Much of the enhancements made at SCI Mercer were done around 2005 or later. Because of its location this facility is at the center of activity in the western part of the state. The facility is located in the center between Lake Erie to the north and West Virginia to the south. It is on the western border of the state but because the facility sits on I-80 as well as I-79 travel to and from this facility is fairly rapid with little obstruction.

The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections has done an outstanding job since the Camp Hill Riots in making its facilities more secure and attending to the needs of the inmates housed within them. They added new facilities with modern

enhancements that provided up to date security and established a system that met the programming and stability needs of the inmates they contained. This in turn has kept the communities within the state safe. Closing SCI Mercer, a very modern Facility with very secure and up to date enhancements, that operates at the lowest cost per inmate in the state with its very professional staff would be a travesty to the state and to the communities in Western Pennsylvania. Relocating this facilities inmate population would further increase the populations of the other institutions in the state. many of these facilities are relying on emergency beds created in the bed management system to house the inmates they currently house. The closing of these correctional facilities when the remaining facilities in the state are at capacity takes us back to the conditions that existed prior to the Camp Hill Riots.