

Written Testimony of Sheriff Genesis C. Arias

Sheriff, Luzerne County

Pennsylvania Senate Hearing on Crime and Public Safety

Chairperson, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity today. My name is Genesis C. Arias, and I am honored to serve as the Sheriff of Luzerne County.

Although I was recently appointed Sheriff, I have spent my career serving the citizens of Luzerne County as a Deputy Sheriff, Sergeant, Lieutenant, and now Sheriff. That experience has allowed me to see how our office has evolved over the years and the challenges we face moving forward.

1. My Day-to-Day Operations and What Has Gotten Easier

As Sheriff, my responsibilities extend far beyond traditional law enforcement operations. On any given day, I oversee courthouse security, inmate transportation, civil process, personnel management, budgeting, policy development, training, and the day-to-day administration of the Sheriff's Office. My responsibility is to ensure our deputies have the leadership, resources, and support they need to serve the citizens of Luzerne County safely and professionally.

One area that has become easier over the years is access to technology and communication. Advances in technology have improved scheduling, case management, information sharing, and communication within our office. These tools allow us to operate more efficiently and better manage our daily responsibilities.

2. What Has Gotten Harder and What Requires a Legislative Solution

While collaboration has improved, the responsibilities placed upon Sheriff's Offices continue to increase.

Today's public safety challenges require agencies to be flexible, responsive, and capable of working seamlessly with one another. However, Pennsylvania's statutes governing Sheriffs have not evolved alongside those responsibilities.

Across the Commonwealth, Deputy Sheriffs often receive comparable professional training and certification, yet their authority differs significantly depending upon the county where they serve.

In Luzerne County, under the authority of District Attorney Sam Sanguedolce, our deputies investigate criminal offenses, file criminal complaints, issue traffic and non-traffic citations, and perform many traditional law enforcement functions.

Yet a Deputy Sheriff in another Pennsylvania county with identical training may be prohibited from performing many of those same duties.

The difference is not training.

The difference is not professionalism.

The difference is not experience.

The difference is that Pennsylvania law has never clearly established a uniform statewide definition of the duties and authority of Sheriffs and Deputy Sheriffs.

That inconsistency creates unnecessary confusion, duplicates law enforcement resources, and can delay service to the public.

The legislative solution is straightforward.

Pennsylvania's Sheriffs are not asking for new powers.

We are asking for legislative clarity.

I respectfully urge the General Assembly to establish a clear and consistent statutory framework defining the duties and authority of Sheriffs and Deputy Sheriffs throughout Pennsylvania. Doing so would improve efficiency, eliminate unnecessary duplication of services, strengthen partnerships among law enforcement agencies, and allow nearly 2,000 trained and certified Deputy Sheriffs to fully utilize the training they have already received.

3. Challenges I Anticipate as Sheriff

Because I have only recently been appointed Sheriff, I have not yet encountered significant challenges unique to the office that I did not experience as a Lieutenant overseeing daily operations.

However, based on my years of service, conversations with Sheriffs/ Deputy Sheriffs from across Pennsylvania, and the legal questions that continue to arise statewide, I believe one of the greatest challenges I will face is navigating the inconsistencies in the statutory authority of Sheriff's Offices.

As public safety continues to evolve, Sheriffs are increasingly expected to work alongside municipal, county, state, and federal law enforcement agencies. Without clear legislative guidance, Sheriff's Offices may continue to face uncertainty regarding the scope of their authority, resulting in unnecessary legal challenges, duplication of effort, and missed opportunities to better serve the public.

Addressing this issue now would allow Sheriffs across Pennsylvania to focus less on legal uncertainty and more on protecting the communities we are sworn to serve.

Closing

Thank you for your time, your consideration, and your commitment to public safety. I appreciate the opportunity to appear before you today.