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Hon. Mark Longietti
2213 Shenango Valley Freeway
Unit 2-E
Hermitage, PA 16148

Dear Mr. Longietti,

I am an inmate currently incarcerated at SCI Mercer. I would like to take this opportunity to describe my personal experience here at SCI Mercer.

The articles that I have read and the announcement made by the D.O.C., which was made available to the inmates, states that specialized treatment programs were among the many factors that would be considered when determining whether or not an institution survives the cut.

I have taken and completed the following treatment programs here at SCI Mercer:

- Batterers Intervention
- Impact of Crime
- Modern Technology for the Longterm Offender

I have also taken treatment programs at other institutions as well. I want to focus specifically on the programs I have taken here. My experience with these programs and treatment staff were extremely beneficial. The Treatment Specialist that instructed me and the classes I took were great. Eventually I became a peer facilitator for some groups. They not only presented the curriculum but also motivated each individual to participate in their own treatment process. I learned things about myself that I had never taken a look at in the past. The staff were always available when needed for extra instruction during the course of the program and even now long after the programming has been complete for myself. The staff inspired me to want to continue in my own treatment and help others by becoming a peer facilitator for the programs from which I completed. My life has been changed for the absolute better because of the programming I have taken here at SCI Mercer.

It is my belief that if this institution is given the chance to stay open and expand the program options here that those incoming programs would become better because of the staff here at SCI Mercer where they truly care about the rehabilitation of the inmates and reducing the recidivism rate in Pennsylvania.

I have also had the incredible opportunity to take voluntary programming such as:

- C.A.R.E. Program for dogs
- Microsoft Office Specialist Certification (in session)

These are the indispensable tools that will be necessary for my success when I return to society. Again I want to state that I have been in many other institutions and these opportunities were not available and I was forced to move here to complete programming. The connection to the community that the C.A.R.E. program gives this prison is extremely rewarding and is invaluable as well! We have saved hundreds of dogs lives as well as being a strong part of the community. I believe the expansion of programming here at SCI Mercer is the way to go if the bottom dollar is being considered. I say this because I believe that when an inmate leaves SCI Mercer, they have a greater chance at success than at other institutions. This is an easy prison to transition from upon release, unlike other prisons, because of the staff and programming. This is my opinion.

Also, upon my release I need this institution to be in operation for what the institution offers the county's economy. I fear that without the institution, more opportunity will leave the county and that means less opportunity for inmates like myself who will be returning to the Mercer County area, which there are a lot of them here. It is my experience that there are more inmates here with local ties then there are not. I need this institution to maintain operations as much as the local economy does in order to keep doors open for me upon release.

I read in an article also that the roads around the institution needed paved? I know that the perimeter road was paved two years ago and tar and chipped last year. The road into the institution is in good shape so are the parking lots. My visitors have told me that the parking lots and access roads are always maintained and they have no complaints.

The hardship on the visitors is another issue all together. My family and I have already been through one closing of a prison (Greensburg) that was an awful experience for my family and I. To say that SCI Mercer would be the easiest on inmates, staff, and families is extremely dismissive and wrong. The hardship this would cause all involved is tremendous and traumatic to say the least. My family and I had no idea when we would be able to visit and see each other once I was moved. Being in Greensburg was actually hard enough because the trip was on the outside of my fathers travel restrictions. My father has major health issues and cannot travel like he used to. That was 4.5 years ago just before that institution closed its doors. There is no way I will be able to see my family if I am sent even as far away as Forrest or Fayette. My family visits would be over if i am sent anywhere else. The hardship will be to great. My fathers ailing health is on record and why I was given an incentive/hardship transfer to this region.

I mention this in hopes that someone will take notice to the potential SCI Mercer has to help all people not just one person or group of people. If the reduction of recidivism is the ultimate goal which would lower the overall budget, then it is imperative that SCI Mercer remain open so that everyone may have a chance to succeed and grow. This closing would greatly impact the economy, staff, inmates, and families. We all need the opportunities that SCI Mercer offers.

I would like to thank you for taking the time to read this letter and any assistance you can offer to help this institution in staying open for all.

Respectfully,


Joseph G. Colosimo