

Board of Commissioners

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Dr. Laurel Harry Pennsylvania Secretary of Corrections Department of Corrections 1920 Technology Parkway Mechanicsburg, PA 17050

RE: Proposed Closure of SCI Rockview and Quehanna Boot Camp

Dear Secretary Harry,

We are writing to you today in response to the Department of Correction's (DOC) announcement regarding SCI Rockview and the Quehanna Boot Camp. The DOC Steering Committee's February 7, 2025, report cites operational costs and personnel costs (i.e., copious amounts of overtime) as two root issues plaguing the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections. To resolve these issues, the steering committee proposed the closure of SCI Rockview and Quehanna Boot Camp. This letter elucidates our strong opposition to this proposal and has twin goals: to demonstrate that the proposed closures do not address the root issues and to lay out a preliminary model of the resulting economic impacts to the counties of Centre, Clearfield, and Clinton.

Considering Solvency

The Steering Committee's report cites costs related to renovations, employee placements, inmate placements, and ongoing operating costs as justifications for the proposed closures. Much of the logic underlying these justifications, however, is myopic—emphasizing short-term results and hinging on unknown contingencies.

The report estimates renovation costs for SCI Rockview and Quehanna Boot Camp at \$74M and \$5.7M, respectively. The steering committee posits that closing these facilities will allow the Commonwealth to avoid these renovation expenditures; however, significant components of these renovations have either already occurred or would be slated to occur regardless of whether the facilities remain in operation. For instance, testimonies from inmates and staff at SCI Rockview confirm that fencing, roof repairs, and updates to the boiler system, among other renovations, have already been completed.

Efforts to redistribute employees in the SCI workforce across Central Pennsylvania after the proposed closures would be untenable. Between SCI Rockview and Quehanna Boot Camp, there are 892 employees, all of whom are guaranteed positions if these facilities close. What is not guaranteed, though, is their job security beyond the closure period. The three closest alternate facilities (i.e., SCI Benner Township, SCI Houtzdale, and SCI Smithfield) have 88 current vacancies. Eighty-eight positions for 892 employees. The number of viable

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positions further decreases when considering which positions are available at a given facility. For example, one corrections officer noted that SCI Benner Township does not employ CNAs, so the talented CNA staff from SCI Rockview may not be reassigned to their closest alternate facility due to position offerings. The steering committee tries to quell these concerns by identifying the number of employees eligible for retirement, whose positions could be filled long-term by the transplant employees. Still, if or when these employee transfers yield fiscal gains is unclear. The ripple effects of bumping thousands of SCI staff Commonwealth-wide will devastate recruiting and overtime costs, possibly for years. Indeed, the report reads as follows:

"The timeline to achieve a full net reduction of the current staffing complements of these facilities is difficult to forecast, without additional information to determine how many employees may retire, how many will replace retiring staff at other locations, and whether (and for how long) some facilities will operate over complement."

Similarly, the proposal suggests relocating 2,148 inmates from SCI Rockview and 348 inmates from Quehanna Boot Camp. Although this relocation is logistically feasible, we identify substantial deleterious effects from doing so. For many inmates, relocation would remove them from specialty programs whose success has not been replicated at different facilities, such as the Quehanna Boot Camp Program, State Intermediate Punishment Program, State Drug Treatment Program, the Pennsylvania Correctional Industries woodshop and furniture restoration shops, and the Forestry Unit. These programs have repeatedly demonstrated that they promote rehabilitation and significantly reduce recidivism. Relocation can also pose threats to the physical safety of inmates, especially vulnerable populations, such as Mental Health Roster Inmates at SCI Rockview. In a letter to the Commissioners, an inmate at SCI Rockview expressed the following concern:

"Imagine the unintended and reckless impact of potential violence like; assault, rape, and extortion the most vulnerable would likely be subject to. To use a common and demeaning predatory prison term, we would be "Fresh Meat" to predators at another facility."

Finally, the proposal purports that closing SCI Rockview and Quehanna Boot Camp can save operating costs, but these savings are likely overstated for at least two reasons. First, as previously stated, the closures do not avoid a substantial portion of the estimated \$79.7M renovation costs. Second, programs that reduce recidivism save taxpayers money, and removing inmates from those programs would effectively increase operational costs. In a letter to the Governor regarding the closure of SCI Rockview and Quehanna Boot Camp, Clearfield County District Attorney Ryan P. Sayers wrote,

"The Boot Camp Program has successfully graduated over ten thousand (10,000) individuals from June 1992 to October 2020 and has had a total cost savings to the taxpayers of almost \$99,000,000 from 1999 through 2020. Thus, the Boot Camp Program has saved the taxpayers a little less than \$5,000,000 a year for the past twenty (20) years."

What is consistent across these arguments is their short-term focus. We can remove the urgency of renovations if people are not housed there, but we cannot eliminate all renovation costs. We can transplant employees, but we cannot guarantee longevity in their placements. We can relocate inmates, but we cannot replicate the ecosystems of SCI Rockview and Quehanna Boot Camp that have proven so beneficial to inmates. SCI Rockview and Quehanna Boot Camp have a proven, multi-decade record of effectiveness. Simply moving the inmates to another facility, without a complete transfer of staff and culture, will not be as effective. As

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detailed above, these moves are likely to fail to ensure a level of effectiveness consistent with existing programs. You will not be able to transfer the entire staff of both Rockview and Quehanna to another facility. Finally, you can make cuts and adjustments now, but in the future, we will reap what we sow—as the costs are redistributed. At best, closures may achieve savings in the short term, but they do not solve the root causes of cost growth and will likely introduce new, harder-to-resolve issues.

Modeling the Economic Impact on the Tri-County Area

While the efficacy of closing SCI Rockview and Quehanna Boot Camp as a long-term means of savings costs is uncertain, the economic impact on the region is certainly negative. From the \$300,000 in economic activity generated by SCI Rockview's Forestry Unit to the wages of the employees, there are many ways in which the closure of these facilities will detract from the economic health of the tri-county area (i.e., Centre, Clearfield, and Clinton counties). Here we offer a preliminary view of the anticipated economic impact these closures will have on the region (see table below).

First, there will be a notable decrease in corrections jobs from the region. Of the 892 employees from SCI Rockview and Quehanna Boot Camp, we estimate 20% of employees (178) would remain in the region to work at SCI Benner, SCI Huntingdon, and SCI Smithfield, meaning a long-term loss of 714 jobs in the region. The steering committee's report alludes to over 900 positions being available, but these estimates are likely inflated. As we have pointed out, there are limited vacant positions currently available, not all facilities offer the same positions, and the majority of the steering committee's proposed vacancies are not *actually* vacant but filled with employees who *may* be retiring soon. Given these reasons and that the committee's report admits the uncertainty in balancing retiring and transferring employees, our estimate reflects a more realistic representation of the impact of the closures on the local workforce.

Second, there will be changes in the population, which will also have economic consequences. Adjusting for the average family size (2.3 people), those 714 corrections employees who will likely leave the county have now more than doubled to 1,643 people. In addition to losing the people in those families, the region would lose 2,496 inmates from SCI Rockview and Quehanna Boot Camp. In total, that is 4,139 people for whom goods and services will no longer be purchased from local vendors. Thousands of people for whom local governments will no longer receive per capita funding. Thousands of people whose wages and economic activity will be lost in this region.

Finally, there will be direct and imminent monetary loss in the tri-county area. Considering the median income for a corrections employee (\$70,333) and the number of employees we estimate to lose (714), we estimate over \$50.2M in lost wages annually from the corrections industry alone. These losses are also felt in the spinoff jobs created from the corrections industry. That is, each corrections employee and their family is estimated to support one additional job or \$50,000 worth of economic activity in the local economy. For the 714 corrections employees estimated to exit the local economy, that translates into \$35.7M in annual loss from spinoff jobs. SCI Rockview and Quehanna Boot Camp also purchase goods and services from local vendors, generating another estimated \$32M in economic activity each year. Lastly, per capita funding allocations will also change as our population changes. Estimating at least \$10 for each of the 4,139 employees, family members, and inmates being relocated, that equates to \$41,390 lost annually in per capita funding for local governments. In total, this amounts to over \$117M lost per year, and these are conservative estimates that do not include healthcare and other benefits received by Rockview and Quehanna staff.

Conclusion

The \$120 million savings proposed from the closure of Rockview and Quehanna are likely an illusion. A substantial portion of the estimated costs for capital improvement projects mentioned are already finished, are underway, or include valuable custom-manufactured components already purchased that cannot be used elsewhere or returned. The ripple effects of thousands of DOC staff being bumped in an ever-widening chain reaction will create havoc with staffing, recruiting, and overtime for years to come. Should the number of incarcerated individuals at state correctional institutions increase at some point in the future, the cost to build a new facility of the size of Rockview is estimated at well over \$300 million. In addition to employees and their families, there would be significant harm to the citizens and the economies of Centre, Clearfield, and Clinton counties resulting from these closures. Ultimately, any savings at the state level are being taken from the local counties in the form of losses. We strongly urge you to reconsider your proposed course of action before a potential disaster occurs.

Employment Impact	Count
Rockview Jobs Lost	658
Quehanna Jobs Lost	234
Total Jobs Lost	892
Adjusted Jobs Lost	714

Population Impact	Count
Staff + Family Lost	1,643
Inmates Lost	2,496
Total People Lost	4,139

Economic Impact	\$ per year
Wage Loss	\$50,217,762
Spinoff Job Loss	\$35,700,000
Local Purchases Loss	\$32,000,000
Per Capita Funding Loss	\$41,390
Total Economic Loss	\$117,959,152