

Senate Transportation Committee

Pennsylvania State Police funding

02/16/16



Good morning Chairman Rafferty, Chairman Wozniak, and members of the Senate Transportation Committee. I am Colonel Tyree Blocker, Commissioner of the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP). Thank you for inviting me here today. I am pleased talking to you about this important issue.

PennDOT and the PSP have long partnered to accomplish the common goal of making Pennsylvania's highways and bridges amongst the safest to traverse in the nation. Both Secretary Richards and I agree that this goal cannot be accomplished without significant financial investment. To this point, the Motor License Fund (MLF) has served as a dedicated funding stream for both agencies and has been critically important with regard to the construction, maintenance and safety of our vast highway and bridge system.

The PSP is the 10th largest police agency in the United States, serving as the primary police force for nearly 3.4 million residents over a 36,000 square-mile area. The PSP has an authorized complement of 4,719 enlisted (i.e., sworn) members. The fiscal year 2015-16 budget for the PSP is approximately \$1.2 billion. Of this, state funds account for approximate \$1 billion which is comprised of \$755 million from the MLF, and \$245 million from the General Fund. Recently, there has been much discussion surrounding the amount of funding the PSP receives from the MLF.

The basis for funding the PSP from the MLF stems from Article VIII, Section 11 of Pennsylvania's Constitution. Section 11 governs and restricts use of the MLF.

Section 11 of Article VIII of the Constitution of Pennsylvania states in part:

"All proceeds from gasoline and other motor fuel excise taxes, motor vehicle registration fees and license taxes, operator's license fees and other excise taxes imposed on products used in motor transportation after providing therefrom.....shall be appropriated by the General Assembly to agencies of the State or political subdivisions thereof; and used solely for construction, reconstruction, maintenance and repair of *and safety on public highway and bridges.....*"

The aforementioned Section has long been understood to include any number of PSP functions that fall under the umbrella of "safety on public highways and bridges."

In 1979, The Governor's Office of Budget and Administration commenced a study to obtain a clear legal basis and accounting of what constitutes PSP traffic safety and patrol expenditures which the MLF is permitted to cover. While there is no formula to determine the percentage of PSP undertakings connected to highway safety, the study concluded that there were both logical and sound methodologies applied for funding PSP activities from the MLF.

The primary mission of the PSP is highway safety. The Department's field operations are divided into 3 Areas and 16 Troops. Each Area is comprised of five Troops. Each Troop is comprised of a Troop Headquarters and two or more PSP Stations. The PSP operates from a total of 89 Troop installations, 16 Troop Headquarters and 73 Stations. Each Troop Headquarters and Station is responsible for providing general law enforcement services within its respective service area. The PSP

is also responsible for providing police service to all interstate highways in Pennsylvania. Of the enlisted members allocated to the Troops and Stations, over 75 percent of them are assigned to uniformed roadway patrol functions. The public image of the PSP is the uniformed patrol Trooper, and that is for good reason. Our members assigned to patrol serve as the Department's backbone, and they are the "tip of the spear" in the PSP's unrelenting effort to keep our roadways, highways, and bridges safe. Even those enlisted members who are not regularly assigned to Patrol functions often play a role in highway safety. It is not uncommon for a non-uniformed Trooper to render assistance to a stranded motorist or take action on any number of highway incidents they encounter, or otherwise don the uniform to augment our efforts during any number of occurrences impacting highway travel.

The Bureau of Patrol (BOP), which is based at PSP Departmental Headquarters, supports and furthers the goals and initiatives to improve highway safety throughout the Commonwealth. In conjunction with our federal, state and local partners, the BOP develops and implements enforcement policies, programs, and strategies to reduce traffic crashes and related injuries/fatalities. The BOP consists of three Divisions: Patrol Services, Safety Program, and Commercial Vehicle Safety. Although each Division has a specific function, their collective goal is directed toward improving highway safety.

The PSP has always taken a proactive and progressive role in ensuring our highways are safe to travel. Take, for example, our Bureau of Criminal Investigation's "Safe Highways Initiative through Effective Law Enforcement and Detection" program,

or SHIELD. The SHIELD program, which was established in 2013, is housed within our Drug Law Enforcement Division. The SHIELD Unit consists of three fulltime teams which operate out of six different locations across the Commonwealth. The teams focus their efforts on the major interstates and highways throughout Pennsylvania. Last year, SHIELD Unit members conducted 4,609 traffic stops and seized contraband and illicit drugs. The street value of the drugs seized exceeded \$118 million. The SHIELD initiatives involve saturation patrol coverage on the main highways and interstates, and undeniably contribute to the overall safety of the Commonwealth's highways.

In addition, there are other specialized units that facilitate and support the Department's patrol and traffic related functions. They include:

- Aviation Unit
- Canine Units
- Forensic Service Units
- PSP Crime Laboratory
- Motorcycle patrols
- Vehicle Fraud Investigators
- Motor Carrier Inspectors
- Watch Center

While these PSP activities highlight our efforts in keeping our highways and bridges safe, the activities I describe are far from exhaustive. Obviously, the overwhelming majority of PSP's efforts are dedicated to patrolling our highways and

keeping them safe. However, we recognize that PennDOT's task of maintaining our transportation system is equally important. The share of the PSP budget coming from the MLF will continue to increase over time. Clearly, Governor Wolf and members of the General Assembly have a difficult task ahead. Regardless of the decision made, the challenge will be to implement a viable new revenue stream to fund PSP operations. While determining alternative methods to fund the PSP is a matter of public policy and beyond the scope of my purview, my staff and I would be happy to provide any information necessary to aid in the evaluation of potential options that may be considered.

Once again, I would like to thank the committee for inviting the PSP here to speak on this matter. I will now be happy to take any questions you may have.