

Testimony provided by:

Joseph Kovel, President
Pennsylvania State Troopers Association (PSTA)

Respectfully submitted to:

Pennsylvania State Senate
Transportation Committee
February 16, 2016

Chairman Rafferty, Chairman Wozniak and members of the committee. Thank you for providing the Pa. State Troopers Association (PSTA) with the opportunity to present comments relative to funding of Pennsylvania State Police operations. The men and women who serve our Commonwealth as Troopers daily face challenges in performing their duties.

While many will think first of the public and personal safety challenges our members face at any given day or hour, and that is clearly of our utmost concern and focus, my members face many other challenges we often fail to recognize or give thought. I am speaking of the availability of resources and personnel that enable us to perform our job.

Pennsylvania State Troopers perform their duties to the best of their ability, but constrained resources challenge their ability to maintain the standards expected of them. Whether it is the lack of available personnel to assist them, the lack of capacity within our labs, a deficient radio system, more municipalities to cover as local police departments are discontinued, the challenge of keeping up with rapidly changing technology, or the challenges of recruiting prospective new Troopers in today's social environment, all impact and challenge my members to adequately perform their duties. To address these recurring issues requires a commitment of financial resources that challenges you as legislators to balance against all the other requests and demands that come to your attention during budget considerations.

Serving as the primary law enforcement agency for over 85% of the state's geographical territory, providing investigative services and lab analysis for nearly every other police department in the state, performing fire investigations, travel safety enforcement on all of our highways and roadways, and truck safety inspections require a significant investment of resources. That is why every year during budget considerations our association urges adequate funding of our department operations and to address our deficient complement level.

I applaud the General Assembly with recognizing this critical need and giving high priority to sustaining adequate funding for our departmental operations. This has been evidenced not only by the annual appropriations directed to the Pennsylvania State Police, along with needed increases, but also with the numerous bills which seek to identify or establish a dedicated funding source for departmental operations.

In fact, several years ago, as Senator Rafferty well knows since he and Senator Tartaglione championed the bill, the General Assembly passed and the Governor signed into law SB 237, which became Act 124 of 2012. This act directed that revenues generated from citations issued by troopers within municipalities that did not provide at least 40 hours per week of local law enforcement, be directed to

a restricted account for funding cadet classes. This was a hard fought win for directing funds to help offset costs of on-going state police operations and the need to fill our cadet classes.

Unfortunately the very next year, the General Assembly, within the Fiscal Code, rescinded the provisions of Act 124 and redirected those funds to the General Fund, presumably to help balance the General Fund, and once again increased the allocation from the Motor License Fund to help address the fiscal needs required to sustain adequate PSP operations.

As the President of the PSTA, my concern is the reliability of obtaining the funds necessary to meet our obligations to provide for the safety of your constituents and my members. As evidenced by what happened to the funding in Act 124, any shift from the current funding structure gives me great pause.

Clearly, the General Assembly determines the funding mix for all state agencies. For a multitude of reasons, over time the share of PSP operations funded from the Motor License Fund has gradually increased, so that today the Motor License Fund provides nearly 75% of our operational budget. However, given the recent gas tax increase, the percentage of the Motor License Fund directed to sustain PSP operations has actually reduced over the past several years. The \$755 million in the 15/16 Motor License Fund for PSP operations represents 16.95% of the total MLF. In the 13/14 fiscal year, the \$621.9 million directed to PSP represented 17.62% of the total MLF.

While I understand the interest in limiting or eliminating the funds allocated from the Motor License Fund to PSP operations, in order to free up more funds for transportation projects, the issue really comes down to how do you replace those funds within the General Fund?

As we have clearly seen over the past seven months, finding new revenues for the General Fund has been a daunting task for the General Assembly and Governor. Shifting the need to fund an additional \$700 million plus within the General Fund, which would be required if Motor License Fund revenues are no longer directed to PSP operations, would only further exasperate the challenge of identifying new revenue streams. Further, a new revenue stream utilized to fund PSP operations would need to be sustainable, predictable, and likely to increase.

The fact of the matter, today PSP provides police services to more municipalities than they did a year ago. We receive more requests for assistance from local police departments, we are challenged with greater intelligence gathering to help prevent acts of terrorism, we must keep pace with new technologies, we must meet ever increasing duties such as background checks, DNA checks, and gun checks. In responding to your constituents concerns for greater public safety our department is frequently tasked with new duties through acts of the legislature.

In light of the additional duties that have been imposed upon the state police and the likely possibility that the Legislative Budget and Finance Office may be tasked with evaluating and recommending the appropriate percentage of State Police funding to come from the Motor License Fund, ***I propose that the task presented to the Legislative Budget and Finance Office be expanded to determine what is the appropriate staffing levels needed to properly fulfill the mission asked of the State Police today.*** The last such review was completed in 2001, 15 years ago.

Much has changed in terms of protecting our communities, roadways, and highways since that time. Before you determine what amount of funding should or should not come the Motor License Fund, or the General Fund, shouldn't we first determine if the resources and staffing we are currently committing to highway safety is adequate and appropriate before limiting a possible funding source, especially if greater resources are needed to insure highway safety?

Capping or eliminating Motor License Fund revenues from offsetting a portion of PSP operational and equipment costs will only increase the pressure on you and your colleagues to find a new reliable revenue source. That is why changing the current funding mix would cause me great concern for the ability of my members to sustain the level of service they provide today, much less meet the challenges of tomorrow.

I would welcome the opportunity to participate on any working group that is assembled to identify alternative revenue streams for funding State Police operations. Unfortunately identifying a predictable and sustainable alternative funding source may prove quite challenging as if such funding was readily available it seems likely to have already been tapped.

Thank you for your attention to this issue.