

Joint Testimony
Pennsylvania Senate Law and Justice/Judiciary Committees
June 18, 2020
PA State Police Holds Its Troopers to the Highest Standards
PSTA President David Kennedy

Good morning. Chairs Baker, Stefano, Brewster and Farnese, thank you for having the Pennsylvania State Troopers Association testify at this important joint hearing.

Let me first say this: I am here today on behalf of 4,255 rank-and-file State Troopers who care deeply for this commonwealth, its communities and the rule of law. Many of us grew up wanting to be Troopers, proud to serve and willing to lay down our lives, if necessary. Since the formation of our department in 1905 — the first of its kind in the nation — we have suffered 98 line-of-duty deaths. Some date back so far we don't even have pictures of those brave Troopers.

We believe our Call of Honor is nothing less than a sacred oath. Every Trooper must memorize it. In particular, it includes this line: "It is my duty to obey the law and to enforce it without any consideration of class, color, creed or condition." The line is important because it means no one is above the law. Including us. Especially us. That's the way it should be.

We're incredibly proud of the work our department has done in the areas of social justice and maintaining proper standards of discipline and behavior. Pennsylvania State Police is a model for holding its Troopers to the highest standards.

The Municipal Police Officers Education and Training Commission (MPOETC) currently reviews and develops curriculum and oversees the training of municipal police officers under the direction of the Pennsylvania State Police. In fact, when President Barack Obama created the Task Force on 21st Century Policing, MPOETC adopted its guidelines.

As far as training is concerned, new electronic platforms have increased the level of training we receive on a daily basis. Some would even say we're in a constant state of training and updating of critical information. We receive in-person and online training on a variety of important issues, including: de-escalation techniques; implicit bias; equal opportunity and inclusion; sexual harassment; and any changes to crimes, vehicle code and rules of criminal procedure. It's important to note that all of this training comes at a considerable cost to taxpayers when you're talking about the ongoing training of nearly 4,300 Troopers.

Pennsylvanians should know that our department already requires a "Fitness for Duty" standard for Troopers. When a concern exists our department requires independent medical and psychological evaluations of our Troopers.



The Pennsylvania State Police also knows it has an important role to play in our communities on social justice issues. Our Office of Heritage Affairs serves as an ally to victims of hate crimes and as a mediator between law enforcement and community members involved in contentious situations. This office also teaches cadets about cultural diversity, racial profiling awareness and implicit bias. We provide these services to other police departments that request it.

In addition, the PSTA has two Committees dedicated to Diversity and Gender equity within our ranks. In fact, our Diversity Committee is embedded within PSP in order to share issues, concerns and solutions.

Governor Wolf has called for the creation of a new Deputy Inspector General and Pennsylvania State Law Enforcement Advisory Commission to review allegations of misconduct. You should know that our department already has an exhaustive review of all instances of misconduct — and seeks outside input into its most serious cases, including police shootings. Internally, review consists of multiple levels beyond internal affairs to ensure both strict scrutiny and impartiality. We maintain both an Equal Opportunity Employment Office and an Equality and Inclusion Office to not only investigate incidents of alleged bias in our work, but also to provide proactive instruction to our members.

And as I indicated in use-of-force cases, we add outside agencies including the district attorneys or Pennsylvania's Attorney General as part of that review for accountability.

Why go through all of these steps? We do this because we took an oath to serve our fellow Pennsylvanians. It includes these words: "I must serve honestly, faithfully, and if need be, lay down my life as others have done before me, rather than swerve from the path of duty." Those who violate this oath do not deserve to wear our uniform.

That said, we want to do more to be helpful in these most serious of issues. This was evident last year when PSTA met with the Legislative Black Caucus to discuss police reforms. We attended two meetings in regards to this matter. We continue to be ready to work together in a bi-partisan fashion.

PSTA fully supports Attorney General Josh Shapiro's initiative for a statewide registry to allow police departments to check the background of all potential officer candidates. In fact, we have long supported a statewide registry so our department can ensure it only hires people who are worthy of being a Pennsylvania State Trooper.

In closing, the Pennsylvania State Police's Call of Honor is more than just words. It's our commitment to our fellow Pennsylvanians.

Senators, I want to thank you for your time today and having this important discussion.