

Legislative Budget and Finance Committee
Pennsylvania State Police Cost to Provide
Safety on Public Highways

Report Presentations by Christopher Latta, March 22, 2017

Good morning. This review of Motor License Fund support for the Pennsylvania State Police has been conducted by the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee staff pursuant to House Resolution 2015-622. The resolution directed the Committee to examine State Police funding in light of constitutional restrictions placed on the Motor License Fund.

To meet our objectives, we reviewed staffing, operation, and time data as of November 14, 2016. During the study we met with State Police personnel including Area Commanders, Bureau Directors, and others. We collected and analyzed data from the Bureau of Research and Development on the number and type of incidents handled by the State Police and the breakdown in incidents, criminal offenses, and arrests. Additionally, we examined the demand for special services provided by the State Police by gathering information from various Bureau Directors.

By way of background, the General Assembly of Pennsylvania created the Department of State Police as an executive agency of state government in 1905. With this action, Pennsylvania established the first uniformed police organization of its kind in the United States. Initially, the mission of the State Police focused on

controlling labor unrest and mob violence, patrolling farm areas, protecting wildlife, and apprehending criminals. Today, the PSP has a broad statutory mandate to “assist the Governor in the administration and enforcement of the laws of the Commonwealth, in such manner, at such times, and in such places, as the Governor may from time to time request.”

In carrying out its mission, the State Police spent approximately \$1.1 billion in FY 2015-16, an increase of 5.4 percent over the prior year. The Motor License Fund and the General Fund were the primary sources of revenue for the PSP, contributing \$755 million and \$259 million respectively.

With regard to the Motor License Fund, the Pennsylvania Constitution identifies three broad purposes for the Fund, one of which is for “safety on public highways and bridges and costs and expenses incident thereto.” The term, however, is not further defined. Therefore, turning to the plain language of the text, we defined the term as it pertains to the State Police as the cost of patrolling public highways, roads, streets, and bridges; preventing and responding to traffic incidents; enforcing the Vehicle Code; and the various overhead costs related to these activities.

Despite this constitutional restriction, the State Police do not track, nor has the Governor’s Budget Office directed them to track, their highway safety expenditures. That said, the State Police does collect information that is useful to

determine these costs, and they were very helpful in working with us to develop a reasonable methodology to estimate their highway safety costs.

We began by taking the total number of Troopers and subtracting from that number the Troopers assigned to PSP Headquarters and to the Turnpike. The difference is the number of Troopers assigned to Area Commands, Troops, and the 80 Stations. From the total of all the field Troopers, we subtracted those Troopers assigned to functions other than patrol—the crime units, for example—and the Troopers assigned to Specialized Patrol Functions, such as the vehicle fraud investigators. This left us with the number of field Troopers assigned to the “core” patrol function of the State Police.

While the mission to promote safety on public highways and bridges is carried out by patrol officers, not everything a patrol officer does is related to highway safety.

To determine those activities that are directly related to highway safety, we examined a Patrol Trooper’s obligated and unobligated time costs, the costs of Specialized Field Troopers, and the subset of obligated time that is directly related to highway safety. Using data provided by the State Police’s Bureau of Research and Development, we found that 51 percent of a Patrol Trooper’s time is spent on general patrol duties, which we allocated as 100 percent related to highway safety. Of

the remaining 49 percent of a core Patrol Trooper's time not spent on patrol—which the State Police refer to as “obligated” time—47 percent is spent on activities related to highway and bridge safety, such as issuing traffic citations and responding to accidents.

We then went through the categories of Troopers that do work related to highway safety but do not have a core patrol function, such as vehicle fraud investigators and the Troopers assigned to truck weight enforcement. Through a series of interviews, the PSP estimated how much time Troopers in these related functions spend on highway safety, which varied from 85 percent to 10 percent. Taking all of these factors into account, we estimated that, all together, the Troopers in a typical Troop spend about 58 percent of their time on highway safety.

We then applied this percentage to each of the field commands (other than Troop T) and to those offices, bureaus, and divisions at the State Police Headquarters that spent a significant portion of their time on highway safety. We made this determination after nearly three full days of meetings with the directors of the offices, bureaus, and divisions at headquarters. The report goes into more detail, but hopefully that gives you at least an idea of the methodology we used to arrive at our calculations.

As shown on page 60 of the report we calculated that the total State Police cost for providing safety on highways and bridges—including both direct and indirect costs—was \$532.8 million in Fiscal Year 2015-16, or 47 percent of all State Police expenditures. The Motor License Fund appropriation to the State Police was \$755 million for that year, or \$222.2 million more than our estimate for PSP highway safety costs.

In conclusion, we gratefully acknowledge the cooperation and assistance that the Pennsylvania State Police provided during this study. I would especially like to thank Major Patrick Brinkley, Director of the Bureau of Research and Development, and his staff, Mr. William Box, Director of the Fiscal Division within the Bureau of Staff Services, and Captain Sean McGinley, former Director of the Office of Legislative Affairs, and his staff for their excellent cooperation during this study.