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House of Representatives
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HARRISBURG

**CHAIRMAN,
AGING AND OLDER ADULT SERVICES**

COMMITTEES
CHILDREN AND YOUTH
DEMOCRATIC POLICY
RULES

December 8, 2010

Ms. Shirley Moore Smeal, Acting Secretary
PA Department of Corrections
2520 Lisburn Rd.
Camp Hill, PA 17001

Dear Acting Secretary Smeal:

I have contacted former Secretary of the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections, Dr. Jeffrey Beard, regarding my concerns with the department's proposal to de-man the guard towers at Pennsylvania correctional facilities, particularly at the facility in my legislative district, SCI Dallas. I have enclosed a copy of my March 22, 2010 letter to former Secretary Beard for your convenience.

I recognize that the department has taken several steps to ensure that prisons are heavily fortified and equipped with the most modern of equipment. However, I am sure you will agree that even the most modern equipment is not foolproof. As you will see in my enclosed letter, I cite the 1999 inmate escape at SCI Dallas as an example of my concerns about the decision to remove the presence of guards at prison towers. Simply put, my apprehension is twofold: I worry for the safety of the nearby community and the ability of the corrections staff complement to safely do their job.

As a state Representative for the 120th Legislative District, I have been elected to protect the well being and interests of my constituents. If my constituents are concerned about their safety because of the department's proposal to de-man the guard towers; I, too, am concerned.

I would appreciate your indulgence in continuing this conversation. Please feel free to contact me at your earliest convenience to discuss my letter and how we can work together to ensure the safety of our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Phyllis Mundy".

PHYLLIS MUNDY
State Representative
120th Legislative District

PM:klz
Enclosure

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March 22, 2010

Dr. Jeffrey A. Beard, Secretary
PA Department of Corrections
2520 Lisburn Rd.
Camp Hill, PA 17001

Dear Secretary Beard:

I write to you regarding my concerns with the department's proposal to reduce guard tower staff at Pennsylvania correctional facilities. I am particularly interested in the impact of such a policy at the facility in my legislative district, SCI Dallas.

First, please know I am appreciative of the hard work and dedication of the many men and women who work in the prison system. Those who work in corrections do an admirable job despite not having infinite resources at their disposal. Moreover, I am very aware of the department's commitment to update equipment and enhance security and safety protocols at facilities across the Commonwealth. Under your leadership, the facilities now have access to much needed high-tech tools such as heartbeat monitors that check vehicles for concealed inmates and biometrics to control entrances and departures.

However, I believe that even the most modern equipment is not foolproof and that we cannot risk another inmate escape. I worry that the growing prison population with the reduction of staff, especially at the towers, poses a liability. My concern for the tower staff reduction policy is twofold: the safety of the nearby community and the ability of corrections staff to safely do their jobs. I worry that the growing prison population will see the reduction of tower staff as an opportunity to flee. I agree with your November 15, 2007 testimony at a House Judiciary Committee hearing that research demonstrates how the certainty of punishment, rather than the severity of punishment, provides the best deterrent. It is with this in mind that I believe that armed guards stationed at a watch tower serve to validate the "certainty of punishment" logic.

As you know, the guard tower complement was reduced in 1996 to cut its operating budget. Those of us who were concerned with this decision were assured that new surveillance and detection systems would make up for the lack of tower officers. And in 1999, two inmates from SCI Dallas escaped within the view of its unmanned towers and eventually made their way through barbed wire underneath one of these vacant towers. These two inmates were at-large for four days and thanks to the authorities, were eventually apprehended. I do not want to speculate what could have happened if these two inmates were not found but I do know that residents lived

Secretary Jeffrey A. Beard

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in fear and considerable resources were spent on a local and state level to find these inmates. Using this instance as an example, I find that de-manning towers is "penny-wise and pound foolish." The cost savings and benefits may seem clear now, but later on may seem impractical.

Using the 1999 SCI Dallas incident as an example, I need assurances that the most recent security upgrades at our facilities are state-of-the art and will drastically minimize possible threats to the community. Additionally, if the proposal is to become a reality, I want to discuss the possibility of local municipalities getting reimbursed for their efforts should an inmate escape occur. It is simply not fair to shift the cost to local municipalities and the average taxpayer.

I would appreciate your indulgence in continuing this conversation. Please feel free to contact me at your earliest convenience to discuss my letter and how we can work together to ensure the safety of our community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Phyllis Mundy". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Phyllis Mundy
State Representative
120th Legislative District

PM:klz