

Mahanoy prison guard beaten by inmate
14-year veteran treated for cuts, other injuries in attack Friday.

By John J. Moser
Of The Morning Call

A guard at Mahanoy State Prison was beaten by an inmate Friday evening, leaving him with gashes to his head, a crushed finger and other injuries, police said.

The alleged attack caused state Republican Party House Whip David Argall to call for more staffing at state prisons.

Corrections officer Joseph Duffy, a 14-year veteran, was repeatedly hit in the face and head by inmate Shawn Breeden of Philadelphia, who used a telephone and garbage can to beat Duffy about 6:30 p.m. until other guards stopped him, state police at Frackville said.

Police did not say what caused Breeden, who is serving a life sentence, to beat Duffy in the prison's day room.

Duffy was taken by helicopter to Geisinger Medical Center, Danville, where his cuts were closed and he was treated for the crushed little finger, bruises and scrapes, police said. He was released Saturday.

Charges of aggravated assault and recklessly endangering are pending, police said.

State Rep. Argall, R-Berks/Schuylkill, said Monday he was "sad to learn of the brutal attack" on Duffy.

"My thoughts are with this public servant and his family," Argall said.

He said the incident "is another reason I believe our prison staffing legislation is critical for the safety of our corrections officers and the communities they serve.

"The staffing is not what it should be at these facilities," Argall said.

He said he feared another incident such as the 1989 riot at Camp Hill State Prison, where criminals held the facility hostage for four days.

The riot, along with others that year in Huntingdon, Graterford and Rockview, put Pennsylvania's prison system on front pages across the nation.

Corrections officers, state police and emergency crews prevented any escapes. But 138 corrections officers were injured and 17 held hostage. Seventy inmates also were injured and 14 buildings were destroyed.

The resulting costs for police, rescue, repairs and cleanup ran into the millions and were paid by Pennsylvania taxpayers.

Argall said he has been working with the state Corrections Officers Association on prison staffing and authored a House bill last legislative session to increase staffing at state prisons.