

Dear Senator:

I am a State Corrections Officer and urge you to support Senate Bill 362. This legislation will help ensure that our state prisons are properly staffed to protect our communities, our inmates as well as our Corrections Officers. There are about 41,000 inmates now in our SCIs, and we are short about 200 correctional officers – even though the positions were funded in the 2003-04 budget.

This should concern all Pennsylvanians because 15 years ago, overcrowding and understaffing were key factors in a riot at SCI-Camp Hill that lasted four days and put a community in danger.

Statewide, no less than 35 Officers were assaulted in January. Of those, the most assaults happened at SCI-Mahanoy (11) and Frackville (6). The volume and viciousness of attacks are escalating because inmates understand they have a numbers advantage. But such attacks aren't a new phenomenon. Last November at SCI-Mahanoy, an Officer working alone because there weren't enough Officers on duty was jumped and stabbed twice.

It takes nearly a year to hire and train a corrections officer, so we should not wait. We need to act now. Our state should not be gambling on the supervision of criminals, many of them violent and predatory.

As a taxpayer, I understand that there are many demands on our tax dollars. Please keep in mind, we are not asking for new tax dollars. We are merely asking you to support Senate Bill 362, which will compel the Department of Corrections to fill the positions it budgeted for – and the General Assembly approved.

It is also important to note this legislation does not guarantee the number of Officers will always increase. It is tied to a formula based on prison population. If the state's new alternative sentencing for non-violent criminals reduces the number of inmates, the number of Officers needed to minimally staff an institution will fall proportionately. That's only fair, and fairness is all we're asking for.

We need your help now to correct this situation. **Please support Senate Bill 362.**

Sincerely,