



**PSCOA  
PAST ACCOMPLISHMENTS & CURRENT PROJECTS  
UPDATED– DECEMBER 2009**

**Background**

When the Winter Group signed on with PSCOA in 2006, we committed our full strength efforts to assure that Corrections Officers had the advocacy that they deserved in Harrisburg. We took on the tough tasks of working with the administration, the Department of Corrections, the Legislature, and all of the members of PSCOA to keep our issues front and center at the Capitol. The results have been very positive. Whether we engaged in the battle to assure proper treatment of union officers on state leave, landmark heart and lung benefits, preservation of forensic units, the screening and monitoring of MRSA cases, prevention of prison privatization, and the continuing battle for safe conditions for our members in prison settings, it is fair to say that the PSCOA has a stronger, more unified and effective presence in Harrisburg than ever before.

We also monitor all legislation introduced and amended for potential impact on corrections officers in PA. We send out a weekly newsletter and legislative tracking reports weekly when the legislature is in session. In addition to the newsletter, we also send an end-of-the-week compilation of news articles of interest in the corrections and law field. We remain available for regular strategy sessions to discuss the PSCOA legislative agenda.

Our efforts also include daily monitoring of DoC activities and dealing with any and all regulatory actions. These have ranged from drug testing, MRSA, prison procedures, staffing, and release conditions. PSCOA receives at least three weekly updates from the Winter Group team.

While it is not possible to list every single legislative item, administrative action, or cause in which we have been involved, we present the following as some highlights of our services to date.

**Accomplishments To Date**

**Collective Bargaining**

In 2006, the Winter Group worked tirelessly on amendments and communicating with legislators on SB 1285 - by adding to Act 71 that creditable leaves of absence would include paid leave for the purposes of serving as an elected full-time officer for a Statewide employee organization which is a collective bargaining representative under the Policemen and Firemen Collective Bargaining Act, or the Public Employee Relations Act. The bill sets a limit of up to 14 full-time business agents appointed by an employee organization that represents correction officers employed by state correctional institutions. The bill was signed by the Governor in November 2006.

**Heart & Lung**

The Winter Group successfully passed the Heart & Lung Act which extends disability benefits to Department of Corrections' employees who serve as the primary caregivers to inmates at the state's correctional facilities.

**Release Provisions**

The Winter Group worked closely with PSCOA on SB 73 of the 2007-2008 legislative session. The bill would amend Titles 42 & Title 61 providing for temporary release & parole from prisons, for inmate medical care & visitations; for inmate labor & motivational camps. PSCOA had 6 major concerns with the legislation (mimics Act 632/534, would it create a 'band' camp instead of boot camp, the dangerous setting of a group home, etc.) and the Winter Group was able to partially amend the bill and stop its passage from the House.

**Hearings/Actions on Privatization**

The Winter Group worked closely with PSCOA officers and staff to prepare and present testimony before the House Judiciary Committee on privatization. Rep. Neal Goodman introduced HB 1469 which would establish a

moratorium on private prison operations and create a legislative task force to explore the feasibility of any privately run facilities. A hearing on the bill was held in October 2007 and October 2008 by the House Judiciary Committee. This began a dialogue with the legislature and the administration that continues. We have made formal presentations on at least four occasions and do not miss an opportunity to oppose privatization in any shape or form.

When the Winter Group and PSCOA took on the Governor and the Department of Public Welfare on the issue of privatization of forensic units, continued to work closely with PSCOA on stopping the privatization of forensic units, we stopped that process in its tracks. In fact, a result of those discussions was to obtain a commitment from the Governor's office itself that no further privatization of corrections activities would commence for the duration of the Rendell administration.

## **MRSA**

Rep. Kerry Benninghoff introduced HB 2041 in the 2008 session. The Winter Group worked with PSCOA to prepare testimony to present before the House Health and Human Services Committee. New legislation is now being drafted based on PSCOA input and concerns.

## **House Corrections Bill Package**

In the 2008 Session HB 4, HB 5, HB 6 and HB 7 were drafted, considered, passed and enacted into law by the Governor. These bills deal with booking fees, prisoner transfer, probation/parole, and courts of record to remove seriously ill convicts from certain workplaces and institutions. In all cases, the Winter Group worked to assure safety for corrections officers and to prevent any weakening amendments the entire way to the Governor's desk.

## **Interactions with New Legislators**

The Winter Group and PSCOA initiated a new practice of reaching out to newly elected members of the General Assembly. Through initial congratulation letters and early offers of cooperation, we have been able to establish close working relationships with many "new faces" in the legislature.

## **Campaign Letters**

Taking political involvement a step further PSCOA and the Winter Group worked with two special election campaigns. We assisted in organized a letter to PSCOA members in Senate District 29, urging them to vote for candidate Dave Argall during a special election (Argall won the seat). In May, we organized a letter to PSCOA members in House District 124, urging them to vote for Jerry Knowles during a special election (Knowles won).

## **Act 534**

A hot issue in the early stages of the current session was an administration effort to reduce costs by taking away certain salary, medical benefits, and workers' compensation packages for PSCOA members. Presented as amendments to Act 534, these changes would have stripped away hard-earned benefits won at the bargaining table. By standing firm and building on political relationships on both sides of the aisle, the Winter Group and PSCOA stopped that effort in its tracks. In part by the actions of the Winter Group, DPW was told that there is no momentum in the House Democratic caucus for their Act 534 legislation, that they have sufficient tools to manage the program now and that the legislature will not pursue the changes they requested.

## **Corrections Officers Awareness Month**

Each year The Winter Group facilitates a resolution to designate June as Corrections Officers Awareness Month in both the House and Senate chambers.

## **Current Key Issues**

### **State Legislation**

The Winter Group is closely following important legislation that would affect the jobs of state corrections officers including:

HB 1332 (confidential communications to a critical incident stress management team member by law enforcement officers) was amended to include 'corrections officers'.

SB 369 (Amends the Emergency & Law Enforcement Personnel Death Benefits Act further providing for death benefit eligibility, & repealing provisions of the Municipal Police Pension Law & Municipal Pension Plan Funding Standard & Recovery Act) was signed by the Governor in October and includes corrections officers.

HB 50, 51, 52 and 53 (attempt to weaken the Agency Shop law or to undermine collective bargaining rights) were introduced in November and after a letter sent to Chairman of the House Labor Affairs Committee from PSCOA opposing the bill, the Chairman responded and said the bills are dead.

We're working with Rep. Jesse White on language that would require inmates to pay for certain incarceration costs if they are able. He is still working on language and doesn't have an introduction date yet, but we will keep in contact with him and other Representatives interested in the bill so PSCOA can have an opportunity to offer suggestions for what inmates would pay for.

Additionally, we're working with Gregg Warner in Senator Greenleaf's office on language defining a correction officer so it can be uniform throughout all legislation.

### **Staffing**

PSCOA and The Winter Group continue to press for a rational approach to prison overcrowding. One concept that under development includes a requirement that the State Corrections Institutions operating at over 110% of capacity would be required to pay Corrections Officers and employees "stress pay" in addition to regular salaries and benefits. Another approach is to require an automatic review of personnel requirements when capacity exceeds 110%.

In November, the Winter Group assisted in coordinating written testimony by PSCOA to be submitted to the Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on prison overcrowding.

### **Congressional Legislation**

The Winter Group has been working with Congressman Tim Holden and the House Judicial Committee on legislation which requires prisons and other correctional facilities holding Federal prisoners under a contract with the Federal Government to make the same information available to the public that Federal prisons and correctional facilities are required to do by law. After several meetings in DC last legislative session, we have continued to be persistent this session by following the same legislation introduced by Rep. Sheila Jackson-Lee – HR 2450.

### **Prison Construction and Staffing**

The Winter Group and PSCOA put aside policy differences with the PA Department of Corrections and worked closely to support the Governor's ambitious prison construction and enhancement plans. We are in the midst of a \$500 million expansion at 5 new sites that will create 10,000-12,000 new beds. Enhancements to Graterford, Huntingdon, and others are also in the works. The goal is to relieve stress on the system and the new staffing will provide more safety for PSCOA members on site.

### **Other Services**

#### **Anti Violence Activities**

The Winter Group and PSCOA moved quickly to denounce the violence against officers and PSCOA members at Huntingdon. With help from legislative supporters, we confronted the local leadership and state officials concerning the effectiveness of review committees and sought solutions to proper handling of violent inmates.

#### **Commonwealth Corrections Caucus**

PSCOA and the Winter Group reestablished the Commonwealth Corrections Caucus with Rep. Bob Belfanti as Chairman.

#### **PAC**

In addition to working with the PSCOA to manage and administer the funds spent through the PAC, the Winter Group has attended several fundraisers and golf outings on behalf of PSCOA.