



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA  
HARRISBURG

**MEMO**

DATE: March 3, 1999

SUBJECT: Recommendations to HR 167 Task Force, re: (1) Establishment of a state agency as liaison with municipal police; (2) Establishment of legislative agency on Local Law Enforcement and Public Safety.

TO: Virgil Puskarich, Executive Director, Local Government Commission

FROM: Rep. Thomas A. Tangretti

This memo responds to the request of the HR 167 Task Force at its Sept. 16, 1998, meeting for additional commentary on recommendations for establishing a state agency to serve as liaison with municipal police and establishing a legislative entity dealing with law enforcement and public safety issues.

**Background**

In the course of the House Democratic Policy Task Force hearings on local law enforcement in 1995, the Task Force heard 78 witnesses, including 38 police chiefs mostly representing police agencies in small to mid-sized communities. The hearings were held in conjunction with the Special Legislative Session on Crime in the belief that local law enforcement capabilities and resources were of critical importance to the prevention and reduction of crime and that the primary sources of relevant information were the municipal officials, police chiefs and officers who are directly involved with those matters on a daily basis.

The House Democratic Policy Task Force also recognized deficiencies in the state's attention to the needs of local law enforcement agencies relative to their vitally important contribution to public safety in the Commonwealth. The fact that in the past quarter century or more only two major items of legislation have been enacted to assist local law enforcement (the Municipal Police Training Act and "piggyback" purchasing for municipal police agencies) is indicative of the attention shortage.

These conclusions were reinforced by frequent comments from the above-mentioned police chiefs and other officials who testified at Task Force hearings to the effect that:

1. They perceive that the problems and resource needs of local law enforcement receive scant interest or attention from the state (many made the point that the Policy Committee Task Force hearings were the first, or most visible, evidence they've seen of the state's interest);
2. They were unaware of various sources of financial or technical assistance to local law enforcement provided by the state and federal governments, or whom in government to contact about such assistance.

The Task Force also paid special notice to the fact that functions related to local law enforcement exist among several state agencies, suggesting the value of a service that would refer inquiries from local law enforcement officials to the appropriate provider.

## **Recommendations**

### **(1) Establishment of a state agency to serve as liaison with local law enforcement.**

Such agency would perform the following functions:

- maintain continuing liaison with the Commonwealth's municipal law enforcement agencies and with the Pennsylvania Association of Police Chiefs;
- as a resource center, develop and maintain a data base of all state, federal and private sources of financial and technical assistance to local law enforcement agencies and communicate the information to municipal and local police officials;
- respond to inquiries by municipal and local law enforcement agencies and provide referral services as needed;
- administer such financial assistance programs as may result from the HR 167 Task Force recommendations or from other legislative actions (i.e., low-interest loans, new grant programs, etc.);
- serve as the lead agency and advocate for local law enforcement in state policy formation and decision making related to local police functions and resources but not to include matters involving employer-employee relations;
- issue an annual report to the Governor and the General Assembly on the agency's activities and on the state of local law enforcement in the Commonwealth with legislative recommendations as conditions indicate.

It should be noted that the proposed agency would be intended not to perform functions currently handled by other state agencies but to refer its law enforcement clients to the appropriate agencies as needed. Consideration may be given to locating such an agency in the Governor's Office, Lt. Governor's Office or the Department of Community and Economic Development.

**(2) Establish a legislative body on Local Law Enforcement and Public Safety.**

Such a legislative entity would perform the following functions on a continuing basis:

- serve as a focal point for the development and review of legislation affecting local law enforcement, fire and emergency services;
- review public-safety-related statutes, programs and legislative proposals in other states for their potential value and adaptation to the Commonwealth;
- maintain contact and communication with related state agencies and with municipal officials, law enforcement officials, fire and emergency services;
- perform research on law enforcement and public safety issues as requested by members of the legislature and respond to their inquiries.

The functions as proposed could be performed by a newly-established legislative commission or joint committee on Law Enforcement and Public Safety, by a House or Senate subcommittee, or by the Local Government Commission with augmentation as may be needed to meet the added responsibilities.