

**Joint Hearing of the Senate & House Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committees
FY 2009/10 Budget Proposal, Scotland School for Veterans' Children
March 11, 2009**

**Paul F. Hastings
Chairman of the State Veterans' Commission**

Madame Chair, Distinguished Members of the Joint Military & Veterans Affairs & Emergency Preparedness Committees, I want to thank you for inviting me to testify before this august body. Allow me to introduce myself.

My name is Paul F. Hastings, a retired Marine Corps Veteran with 22 years active service with the U. S. Marine Corps and Marine Corps Reserve, separated and medically retired in 1972. I was appointed to the state Veterans' Commission by the 41st Governor of Pennsylvania in 1984 to be the Vietnam Veteran representative on the Commission. Each subsequent Governor has reappointed me when my four-year term of office came up for reappointment. I was elected the Chairman in 1991 and I have been reelected each year by my peers as its Chairman.

The Veterans' Commission is composed of the state Commanders of fourteen Veteran Service organizations and the President of the County Directors of Veterans Association, as well as four other Veteran members at large appointed by the Governor. One of the Specific duties of the Commission is to "recommend to the Governor legislation for submission to the General Assembly concerning veterans and their activities".

The Veterans' Commission was not consulted by anyone in the administration to request input on the potential closure of the Scotland School for Veterans' Children. As the Chairman, I received notification the afternoon before the Governor was to announce the elimination of funding for SSVC in his budget address. My initial reaction was what arrangements have been made to place the students currently enrolled at the school? This notification of potential closure came as a complete shock and surprise.

Sending a child to Scotland School is a privilege Pennsylvania's veterans have earned by placing themselves in harm's way for the protection of the citizens of the Commonwealth and the country. Military deployments have increased significantly in recent years, and there will be a continuing need for a strong and adequately staffed military to assure our national security. Consequently, there is a growing need for the Scotland School.

There are costs to taxpayers and to society as a whole that would result from the closing of SSVC. Many of the students would be returned to situations where they would require Medical Assistance, food stamps, Temporary Aid to Needy Families and subsidized housing. Moreover, there are costs to taxpayers and to society for higher dropout rates, a lessened tendency to further one's education beyond high school and, in extreme cases, the temptation to engage in crime and the resulting entanglement in the criminal justice system. These factors would offset a significant portion of the small savings that would be realized from closing the school.

Putting 186 teachers and staff out of work, along with the curtailment of business to contractors and vendors, would have a significant, negative impact on the economy of the Chambersburg area and Franklin County.

Some of the students at SSVC are among Pennsylvania's most vulnerable citizens. The suggestion that the education and nurturing offered by Scotland School is readily available elsewhere is simply wrong. The lack of alternatives is one of the reasons these students are so vulnerable and at-risk in the first place, and they should not be thrown back into unsafe environments for the sake of expediency.

Even in the best case, giving families only seven months to make other arrangements before the beginning of the next school year places a hardship on them and is extremely unfair. Many families will not be able to make acceptable arrangements in such a short time.

The SSVC alumni and the parents or guardians have hundreds of success stories, in terms of how the school has helped military families in their time of need, as well as the many stellar accomplishments of the school's graduates. The school is successful.

Although some in the administration acknowledged that SSVC is an effective and worthwhile institution, there apparently was no thought given to allowing the school to remain open by securing alternative funding sources. Failing to give the school enough time to explore any of those alternatives will most likely cause the end of this successful institution and is not fair to many who rely on SSVC now or who could in the future.

At the state Veterans' Commission meeting of February 6, 2009, the members of the Veterans' Commission voted on a Motion by State Commander of the American Legion, Wendall Sandell, and Seconded by State Commander of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Larry Wade, opposing the removal of funding for the Scotland School for Veterans' Children. The motion was adopted unanimously.

During 2007, the Defense Solutions conducted a study that indicated the SSVC "is a unique institution offering quality residential education to the children of Commonwealth Veterans." The study team concluded that "SSVC is a valuable institution and worthy of being saved." The study further indicated that it "would be a mistake to take away what may be a child's only chance to a safe and nurturing environment." Further the study team "was very impressed with the uniqueness of the Scotland School and the potential that it holds to be the 'crown jewel' for Pennsylvania's veterans." The study found that from the years of 2001 through 2006, 95% of its graduates have gone on to college, a trade school, or entered military service.

In 1996, the former SSVC Superintendent organized an effort to create a Scotland School Foundation for the purpose of establishing a capital reserve fund. This Foundation was a result of a need to assist in funding equipment to conduct a viable "Culinary Arts program" at the school. The Foundation became a reality and I was enlisted to come aboard as a Director of the Foundation. It was an honor to be elected as the Foundation's first President. We borrowed funds to outfit the school with the equipment necessary to fulfill the needs of the Culinary Arts program. That initial loan has been totally repaid.

The Foundation for SSVC provides scholarships to the graduates of the school for higher learning as well as providing assistance to many other "quality of life" funding for the students during their stay at the school. Many other "above the budget" activities available to the students are

financially supported by several Pennsylvania Veterans Service organizations. These organizations donate funds for items like the Senior Prom, Christmas parties, picnics, presentations to graduates and class rings to the Junior Class.

The Defense Solution study sums up their study with the statement that “A decision to modify, retain, or to close Scotland School should rest on more than a simple analysis of potential savings. Savings are important, but first and foremost we urge the General Assembly to consider what is best for the children.” I fully concur in that statement.

Thank you for allowing me to come before your committee today. I will attempt to answer any questions.

Respectfully,

/s/ Paul F. Hastings
Paul F. Hastings
Chairman, PA Veterans’ Commission