

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

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Chairwoman Baker, Chairman Melio, Chairman Fairchild, Vice Chairman Robbins, Chairman Farnese, Senator Scarnati, Representative Taylor, Representative Goodman, Representative Solobay, and members of the committee of the joint committee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the proposed closing of Scotland School for Veterans Children (SSVC). The closing was proposed in the 2009-2010 budget proposed by Governor Edward G. Rendell on Wednesday, February 4, 2009.

I am the Commander, Department of Pennsylvania, Jewish War Veterans. I am also the President, Pennsylvania War Veterans Council.

I live in Philadelphia, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Senatorial District (that of Senator Christine Tartaglione) and the 174<sup>th</sup> House District (that of Representative John Sabatina). I attend the meetings of the United Veterans Council of Philadelphia. I am a member of many veteran service organizations in Philadelphia.

I am particularly concerned about this issue because many of the resident students of SSVC are from Philadelphia. Veterans have indicated to me their utter dismay and astonishment.

The initial concern is the loss of a veterans benefit. While I sympathize with Governor Rendell in his efforts to balance the budget in these economic times, it does not seem fair to do it at the expense of veterans and their families, who have already sacrificed mightily for our country and our commonwealth.

Another concern is the lack of consultation before the fact with the veteran community. I would have appreciated the opportunity to participate in a careful study of options. For example:

- Are there less expensive programs available that could provide the same services?
- Could part of the money currently appropriated for SSVC follow the students to those other programs, thus saving the Commonwealth money but not placing the children at undue risk?
- Could the veteran and civilian population of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania be asked to support SSVC in a different manner, thus ensuring its continued survival?
- Could the SSVC alumni help meet part of the budget shortfall?
- To what better purpose than education, housing, feeding, and caring for veterans' children can the assets and property of SSVC be put?

- Could the assets be sold and then leased back to SSVV for a long-term period?

If all the stakeholders (parents, students, faculty, administration, DMVA leadership, veteran community leadership, state budget officials, etc.) were to gather together and brainstorm this problem under creative facilitation, could a better solution be reached?

Another concern is the possible consequences of the action. For example:

- What will be the impact of this apparently unresearched decision on the lives of about 500 citizens of the Commonwealth (including not only the students but also the staff and faculty)?
- Will the short-term savings of \$45,000 per year per student be offset by future higher incarceration rates, the costs of which can be even greater for juveniles?
- Is it less expensive to keep the children at SSVV where they have an opportunity to grow up in a somewhat sheltered environment than it is to thrust them back into an environment where they may be at risk?
- Do the children who have been at SSVV for several years still possess all the requisite “street savvy” to survive in the neighborhoods of their origin?
- What kind of a callous message of disregard does this send to the students of SSVV? Will they see themselves as “expendable” and “not worth the cost?”

The rationale for the proposed closing appears to be driven purely by budget considerations. Of course, every budget ends up being a compromise between competing interests. In its final form, it represents the priorities of its formulators. Can we be certain that funds formerly appropriated for SSVV will be used any more wisely elsewhere in the budget?

For example, the governor has added to his budget proposal \$35 million in funds to restore PHEAA education grant programs and \$15 million to fund grants to students attending community colleges. This total of \$50 million would benefit institutions of higher learning and the students who benefit from attending them. Only 20% of this amount, \$10 million, would be enough to keep SSVV open. It is upsetting to think we are taking money away from the children of veterans in order to benefit other children.

The veteran community has already demonstrated its willingness to assist in helping the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA) to reduce costs and increase revenues. For example, at the February meeting of the Pennsylvania War Veterans Council (PA WVC), the membership approved withdrawing support for two of its legislative goals in order to help DMVA limit their expenditures.

Also, at the February meeting of the Pennsylvania State Veterans Commission (PA SVC), the membership approved a motion to reduce the frequency of their meetings and limit the location

of those meetings to Fort Indiantown Gap. This will reduce travel costs incurred by the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs (DMVA).

At that same meeting of the PA SVC, the membership voted to support restoring the funding for SSVC.

At the meeting of the Legislative Committee of the PA WVC held on Tuesday, March 3, 2009, it was voted to recommend to the PA WVC that the Mellow Amendment to SB 57, be supported.

It is likely that every state executive department was asked to cut their budget to share the pain in an equitable manner. However, when it comes to the DMVA, it seems that it is asking too much for an agency that serves those who have performed military service for our country and commonwealth to take similar cuts. In such instances, the pain may be more greatly felt than if the cuts were made to some other part of the budget.

The late Judge Lisa Aversa Richette, the first woman judge in Philadelphia, wrote the book, *Throw Away Children*, in 1969 (Philadelphia, J. R. Lippincott). It is based on her experiences as the Assistant District Attorney for Philadelphia. It is a story of how the powerful ignore and discount the powerless. Children appear to be an easy target for neglect. However, as Milton Friedman would say, "There's no such thing as a free lunch." Or, as it was stated in the oil filter commercial, "Pay me now, or pay me later."

As stated in "Journey to Greatness with Noah benShea," which aired on Chanel 23 on Wednesday night, "Greatness is how people with power treat people without power.... Compassion is caring with passion.... On the journey to greatness, one should wear a warm heart and an open mind.... Be cautious of those who confuse kindness with weakness.... It is a great deed to plant the seed of a tree from which we will never pluck the fruit."

**In conclusion**, let us please keep our priorities straight. Let's send the correct messages to those impressionable youngsters, of whom Secretary of State Clinton may say, "It takes a village to raise." Timely resolution of this issue is critical as the uncertainty, anxiety, and false hope thus engendered may result in great damage to SSVC by the loss of some staff and students.

Chairpersons Baker and Melio and members of the joint committee, I thank you for your time and attention. I am happy to answer any questions you may have at this time.