



***Statement of
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The Adjutant General
Department of Military and Veterans Affairs
to the
Senate Veterans' Affairs and
Emergency Preparedness Committee
House Veterans' Affairs and Emergency
Preparedness Committee***

11 March 2009

Chairman Baker and Chairman Farnese, Chairman Melio and Chairman Fairchild. Members of the Committees.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss Scotland School for Veterans' Children. It is a pleasure to appear before you, even under these painful circumstances when we're here to talk about budget cuts.

As we meet today, no one can doubt the harsh fiscal realities facing our nation and our Commonwealth. Governor Rendell said this was the most difficult fiscal situation that the Commonwealth had faced in many decades, and I believe we can all agree with his assessment. The Governor has proposed elimination of 101 state programs, one of which is Scotland School.

As the Governor said, Scotland School certainly has a laudable purpose. Its long and proud history is worthy of our praise and admiration. In 1895, Civil War-era schools and homes for war orphans were consolidated at Scotland in Franklin County.

Over the years, the name, the mission and the focus of Scotland School have changed. Today, the School provides elementary and secondary education for 271 students in grades 3 through 12 for nine months of the year on a campus with 183 acres and 70 buildings.

Today's students need not be war orphans or even children of veterans. In 1994, the law was changed to permit grandchildren, nieces, nephews, brothers and sisters of veterans to be admitted on the same basis as children of veterans. Scotland School has identified 22 students whose veteran sponsor is currently in military service (Active Forces, National Guard, Reserves). Of these, the School identified 4 students, at least one of whose parents is currently deployed overseas.

Operating a residential school to provide elementary and secondary education to relatives of veterans is not a federally-recognized veterans' benefit. Unlike our state veterans' homes for example, the Commonwealth receives no funds from the U.S. Department of Veterans' Affairs to support Scotland School. No other state operates a school like Scotland School; Indiana's school has a somewhat similar heritage, but its mission and focus differs from Scotland School. The Indiana School is scheduled to close in May 2009.

Scotland School offers a general education in a safe, caring residential environment. I've met many students and alumni of Scotland School, and I have been heartened by the individual success stories I've heard. You'll be hearing more of them today, and many of the students and graduates of the school feel that the School has changed their lives for the better.

I believe we need to keep these laudable individual achievements in perspective when considering the difficult, sometimes heart-wrenching fiscal decisions that face our Commonwealth today. All of us as public officials must be mindful of the costs and the cost effectiveness of programs. Today's budget crisis has prompted an in-depth examination of all state programs, and none is exempt from scrutiny.

When you step back, set aside our long-standing and deeply-felt connections to Scotland School, and look at the facts, you can certainly understand why the Governor made the tough decision to eliminate future funding for the School.

Providing elementary and secondary education to relatives of veterans in a residential setting is **NOT** a core function of state government. If it were, you would expect that other states would be performing this function and that the VA would consider it a veterans' benefit. In Pennsylvania, free public education is offered by local school districts, and every child at Scotland School has the opportunity to take advantage of a wide range of other educational opportunities.

Of the \$13.5 million per year Scotland School spends each year, about \$10.5 million comes from the Commonwealth's General Fund and \$2.4 million of which

come from the school districts whose students come to our School. About 70% of the spending at Scotland School is for personnel costs, with the remaining 30% for operations and maintenance and fixed asset costs.

Based upon enrollment figures when the Governor made his announcement, Scotland School was spending more than \$45,000 per year per student for nine months of schooling and residential services.

I've heard it said that comparing per student spending at Scotland to spending at public schools is like comparing apples and oranges. It's true that Scotland School offers a range of residential services during the school year that go well beyond those offered in the public schools. These residential services are, of course, only provided because they support the learning environment at the School.

But even if you separate out the residential costs and just compare costs like those reported by school districts, Scotland School still spends much more than the average school district spends per student. Excluding spending on room and board and residential services, the School spends about \$28,000 per student per 9-month academic year.

Because of its small size, Scotland School does not offer the same range of academic offerings available in other schools. The Department of Education will provide a great deal more information about these educational options, but for now, I want to report that we in the Department of Military and Veterans Affairs and the Department of Education are taking positive actions to get the best possible information into the hands of parents and families so they can pursue the best available educational options in the future.

The Department of Education has worked with school districts, including the School District of Philadelphia, which is the home district of about 70% of our students, to make the best possible options available. Recognizing that parents didn't learn of the decision to close the School until February, special arrangements were made to extend deadlines to allow these students to get into special admissions and charter schools.

At Scotland School itself, we are committed to working hard to make the current academic year a success. We know that the decision to close the School is a distraction, but we must ALL do our best to move forward in a positive manner keeping in mind that the best interests of the students is the paramount consideration for the remainder of this school year.

I know that many parents, alumni, students and veterans think the best option for the Commonwealth is to maintain the status quo and keep Scotland School as a state-operated institution. My staff and I understand that closing an institution that families have come to rely on as their preferred educational option is painful and difficult. The summaries of the parents' meetings that were held last month clearly show the depth of the dismay felt by many.

We all feel compassion for the students and their families -- and for our staff and faculty -- as they come to grips with the need to close Scotland School. We are sorry, and we are truly saddened by these circumstances. But, considering our fiscal situation and the harsh realities of the budget, keeping Scotland School in operation as a state-operated school is no longer a viable option.

I've provided the Committees with a brief fact sheet summarizing some key information about Scotland School. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this report.