

My name is Robert Courtright. I recently retired from the Pennsylvania State Police with more than 25 years of service. My recent assignment was as the Criminal Investigative Unit Supervisor for the Ephrata Station from March of 2004 until April 2012. Additionally I spent the majority of my career in Troop J with nine years in the Criminal Investigative Unit and five years in the Patrol Unit at Lancaster. I thank you for the opportunity to express my concerns regarding the recent changes proposed by the Department in regards to the future of Troop J and the Ephrata Station. I hope to be helpful to some measure and provide the prospective of an Officer that has worked the majority of his career in the field.

During my career there has always been pressure to contain costs. Budget have always been tight and I have often heard the mantra of "doing more with less". The Department has properly wanted increases in manpower as populations and police responsibilities have increased. There has been a focus on civilianizing of positions and consolidations of facilities.

More than a decade ago it was proposed that the Ephrata Station could be closed and Troopers dispatched from Lancaster, perhaps saving some costs in leases and command staff. Additionally the Departments number crunchers are reviewing current trends in incidents responded to by Ephrata members. This thinking is based on a staffing formulae developed by the Department to divide scarce resources. This reactionary formula determines minimal numbers of Troopers necessary to respond to crashes, crimes and other citizen complaints. It is this very formula that will likely result in the transfer out of Lancaster and Chester Counties the majority, if not all, of any additional patrol troopers created as a result of closing the Ephrata barracks and the elimination of Troop J.

Ephrata's numbers have decreased so far in 2012 mostly due to Rapho Township's decision to support a local police department . Local municipalities create Police Departments when they are dissatisfied with service provided by the State Police. Their primary complaint is response time. Our Troopers are well trained dedicated professionals, who provide high quality in service when they arrive. However citizens want to be assured of a quick response in an emergency and a reasonable response for a non emergency.

The State Police covers large geographical areas which is not conducive to a quick response at all times. Consolidation is counter intuitive in regards to response time. Service provided to communities will be less as we retract from those communities

The location of a station directly affects response times. There are times when units respond from Stations directly to incidents. Brecknock Twp is 29 mile drive from Lancaster compared to a 10 mile drive from Ephrata. Obvious many other examples could be cited. I ask if it's really sensible to have a Station 30 miles from the jurisdictions it covers. There is no question that the State Police is now and has always been spread thin.

This decision to close Ephrata will affect State Police Service to the citizens in the northern part of the county. Volunteer firefighters will have to wait longer at crash scenes for Troopers, and citizens will need to travel further to meet with Troopers at Stations. Typical response times will be longer and unobligated time will be spent elsewhere. Self initiated arrests and contacts will be closer to the Lincoln Highway area. The State Police presence in the Ephrata community will be reduced.

The Ephrata Station is part of the community. Its elimination will have an effect in the community. Many times citizens have stopped at the Ephrata Station to meet with Troopers over a myriad of problems. On one occasion a man brought in his elderly father who was having trouble driving. The father respected Troopers and wanted to talk with a Trooper before deciding to surrender his driver's license. This kind of citizen interaction with the police will be greatly reduced. The State Police will be more distant and less connected to the community.

The community does not want to see the Station closed which validates its significance. Local government has been extremely supportive of the Stations presence.

Additionally small stations like Ephrata are efficient. They are less bureaucratic and all members are engaged in the community. Trooper know the community well and are familiar with regional problems.

I agree that during difficult economical times that we need to seek ways to stretch dollars and cut spending, however law enforcement is a primary responsibility of government. This decision will have a negative effect on public safety.

Thank you for your interest in this important issue and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.