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October 22, 2019

Honorable Chair and Members of the Board of Chosen Freeholders of Mercer County
McDade Administration Building
640 South Broad Street
P.O. Box 8068
Trenton, NJ 08650

Dear Chair and Members of the Board:

I am writing today to express my strong opposition to the proposed merger of the Mercer County Correctional Facility with Hudson County.

I would love nothing more than to be there in person to ask you to take this proposed merger off the agenda, but I am currently presiding over the previously scheduled State PBA Annual Convention. Rest assured, the Mercer County Freeholder Board meeting will definitely be a topic of conversation.

In the past, we have had a tremendous working relationship. That is why I cannot understand why you are even considering a proposal that will have a significant long-term negative impact on Mercer County taxpayers while also potentially placing your constituents and surrounding areas in peril.

It is my understanding that each member of the Freeholder Board is already in possession of detailed analysis put forth by legal counsel representing 167 and 167A. This analysis was done using your own Staffing Analysis of September 19 along with the September 10, 2019 report provided by the consulting firm responsible for this truly awful proposal.

An unbiased analysis of your own data shows that the "savings" proposed N.W. Financial report will never be realized. This review shows that your staffing report of just over one month ago determined that there were 135 officers, not including supervisors, needed to run the Mercer County jail after any agreement. Yet, the report submitted by these Hudson County consultants

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assumes taxpayer savings based upon staffing only 98 officers to cover the same number of posts, not including supervisors.

This alone represents more than \$6 million in additional costs or one-half of the false savings in the merger proposal! Unless you plan to ignore your own staffing report and significantly understaff the jail, county taxpayers will be on the hook because this is far from the only cost that the consultants ignore.

The N.W Financial report also ignores the five-year average of \$10 million per year in overtime and average uniformed officer overtime of \$50,000 in 2018 and, instead, assumes an overtime cost of zero! It also undercounts fringe benefits by over \$1.5 million and ignores the five-year maintenance average of \$3.657 million by cutting it by more than 2/3rds for additional, phantom, savings. These additional ignored costs add at least \$6 million more in costs.

The full savings being claimed in this proposal are not based in reality because your own data shows the ignored costs exceed the savings being claimed. And, the people you represent will have to pay for it.

Further, if this proposal goes through, you will be authorizing the transport of busloads of prisoners back and forth on the Turnpike over 60 miles a day.

Logistically, this long-distance busing proposal on our already congested roadways makes no sense. You have all driven the same roads that are now being proposed for daily prisoner transport. It is absurd for anyone to believe a drive back and forth on the Turnpike will be anything but unpredictable on a day-to-day basis.

This discussion isn't about the distance on a map; it's about officers transporting prisoners back and forth on the Turnpike over many miles subject to ever changing daily perils. Inclement weather, construction, and car accidents all create a travel environment that is difficult for even the daily commuter driving in the left lane. The impact of the inevitable delays are not calculable here today.

If this proposal is approved you will have judges in Mercer requesting defendants be brought in from Hudson County, sometimes on a moment's notice. Or you'll have prisoners being transported from Trenton up to Hudson. These are costs you cannot possibly be able to calculate with travel hazards

How much of your alleged savings will vanish based on traffic delays, transportation, or a missed court date that needs to be rescheduled as a result? What happens to your alleged savings when Hudson County can't do intake quickly enough and your officers are left waiting

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hours? One 8 AM bus trip could mean you don't see those officers again until their shift is done. The overtime costs due to unforeseen circumstances are incalculable.

Then there are the pressures you cannot begin to imagine being placed on your corrections officers. Transfers in rush hour traffic that can end up costing taxpayers in both counties because of an overturned tractor trailer or a lane closed for construction. That is a ride that can make even the driver coming home from work by himself or herself fraught with tension.

Now add a busload of prisoners and the knowledge that any one of these traffic choke points could be the scene of an ambush. At the risk of painting this Freeholder Board an unimaginable picture, we know enough about desperate criminal behavior and gangs to know it is certainly not out of the realm of possibility.

I cannot state strongly enough exactly how bad this proposal will be for all those involved. This is a dangerous, misguided alliance that will not live up to the expectations being presented to the public and will, in fact, cost County taxpayers money.

Many good officers and their families will be impacted for years to come for savings being promised that will NEVER materialize, all while the Mercer County court system gets thrown into chaos and busloads of prisoners sit in Turnpike traffic.

This is a logistical and public safety nightmare waiting to happen, all while you eliminate good-paying jobs in your county.

Our corrections officers deserve better and the people you represent deserve better than to be told this will all run smoothly because of the false claims made by an outside consulting firm.

I am asking again that you at the very least shelve this proposal until you have real answers to questions being raised here. The State PBA and our officers in Mercer County are willing and cooperative partners in protecting public safety while respecting your bottom line. This proposal will NOT work and you shouldn't waste taxpayer money and risk the lives of hard-working law enforcement officers to find that out.

Very truly yours,



Pat Colligan
State President

cc: Jerlene H. Worthy, Clerk to the Board of Chosen Freeholders
Michael W. Herbert, Board Counsel