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Assemblyman Louis D. Greenwald
Chair, Assembly Budget Committee
1103 Laurel Oak Rd
Suite 142
Voorhees, NJ 08043

Dear Assemblyman Greenwald,

Please allow this letter to serve as an introduction. My name is Steve Brzdek, and I am the President of the New Jersey Law Enforcement Supervisors Association (NJLESA). The NJLESA serves as the exclusive certified collective bargaining unit representing supervisory law enforcement personnel at the rank of Sergeant throughout the State of New Jersey. In this regard, and with budget hearings fast approaching, please accept this letter as our formal request for continued funding and legislative support for the current shift-overlap policies within the Department of Corrections (DOC) and Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC). Shift-overlap is an indispensable information sharing tool that deserves to be preserved and protected to help ensure the safety of staff and the security of all state institutions.

Prior to July 1997, the DOC and JJC utilized a thirty (30) minute shift-overlap period that consisted of a lineup and roll-call of all oncoming uniformed staff while the off-going shift continued to man posts throughout the prison. After roll-call, which also consisted of a thorough inspection of personnel to ensure staff accountability, fitness for duty, and adherence to the uniform and safety standards, all pertinent information would be shared with the shift. This vital briefing included detailed descriptions of events that occurred on previous shifts, as well as any special alerts, precautions, or intelligence that needed to be considered to ensure the safety and orderly running of the following shift.

This widely accepted law enforcement practice was then reduced year after year in five minute increments and was eventually eliminated in an interest arbitration award in 2002. As the number of gangs and their members exploded through the prison population statewide, our best tool for combating their harmful activities was taken away. Ultimately, the lack of consistent and structured information sharing had a major affect on institutional security and undoubtedly caused many unnecessary expenditures such as overtime for prison lock-downs, search details after violent gang incidents, and costly litigation with injured inmates and staff. It is also important

to note that a key component to line-up was and is the fact that all pertinent information from previous shifts is delivered to all oncoming shifts by one credible and consistent voice, as opposed to numerous "rumors" or often distorted information being passed through one on one communication.

Last budget year, after being recommended by the Corrections Transition Policy Group in their Final Report dated January 10, 2006 and the Assembly Prison Gang Violence Task Force in their Final Report dated December 12, 2006, a fifteen (15) minute shift-overlap was restored for all shifts at all adult and juvenile facilities. Almost immediately after its restoration, a boost of morale was recognized within all uniformed ranks. The information sharing investment, estimated at a cost of approximately fourteen (14) million dollars annually, was received by many as a renewed commitment to give custody staff the pro-active tools that they desperately needed.

Unfortunately, given the financial crisis facing the state budget this year, we again find ourselves defending this most important policy. However, in the context of today's thirty (30) billion dollar state budget, the realized value from credible and consistent information sharing from shift to shift far exceeds the minimal cost. Therefore, on behalf of the membership of the New Jersey Law Enforcement Supervisors Association (NJLESA), and all uniformed staff within the DOC and JJC, I implore you to reconsider any plans or proposals to reduce or eliminate shift overlap. Clearly, we cannot afford another multiyear gap in our intelligence and information sharing apparatus. Each and every shift deserves to start their tour of duty with the most up-to-date information as possible. If not, the costs to both staff safety and institutional security will be far too great.

In closing, thank you for your time and consideration with this most important matter, and please know that I am available to answer any questions and/or testify during the budget hearing process if necessary. Also, for additional information, please refer to the included bills (S 1141, A1789, and A1994) that were introduced by your colleagues in both the Assembly and the Senate

Sincerely,

Steve Brzdek
President, NJLESA

c: Assembly Budget Committee Members
George W. Hayman, DOC Commissioner
Veleria N. Lawson, JJC Executive Director
Joseph Maligrino, PBA #105 President
Jeff Smith, NJSOA President
Scott Derby, NJSOA-CU President