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State of Pennsylvania

May 18, 2009

The Honorable Jessica L. Wright
Adjutant General
PA Department of Military & Veterans Affairs
Building P-O-47
Fort Indiantown Gap, Annville, PA 17003-5002

I was extremely disappointed to see the press release you issued on Friday. Not only was it completely out-of-line with the fiscal facts, but it needlessly alarmed veterans and their families. Perhaps most frustrating to me is that it was at odds with the bipartisan spirit of cooperation with which we have tried to address the needs of our veterans, and to deliver on our state obligations to them.

In most of the lines affecting your department, the Senate-approved budget reflects the reductions recommended by Governor Rendell. There were no hints of potential catastrophic impact when he first proposed those cuts. The real difference between the two is that we only funded currently-filled positions. We did not fund vacancies. In light of the hiring freeze the Governor imposed some time ago, it is not clear why you were apparently counting on these positions. The sudden stance that the homes are understaffed, that security is wanting, and that the care provided right now is deficient is curious. And if those things are being adequately provided with the current complement, nothing materially changes come July 1st.

In respect to the Supplemental Life Insurance Premiums, the funding reflects what your department has actually spent. Again, we have looked at thirty months of experience, and have not seen material indicating how the payout is going to dramatically increase.

The most regrettable aspect of the release was speculation about the closure of a home. The reality is that there is a greater risk of New Jersey invading the Commonwealth to capture our casinos than there is of Pennsylvania closing down a veterans home. There is absolutely no need to close a home, and legislators will not let it happen.

The Honorable Jessica L. Wright

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It is unfortunate that continuing, drastic declines in revenues have rendered the Governor's proposed budget out-of-balance and out-of-date. But that is the reality we must confront. Using Pennsylvania's veterans and care facilities as unwilling players in cheap political theatre does not advance the budget discussion or the confidence in state government one inch.

Given the legislation, services, and funding we have achieved in recent years, there is no reason for you to doubt the commitment of Senators to supporting the National Guard, our veterans, and the individuals providing services in our state-owned facilities. I remain hopeful that we can continue to work with your department on these issues.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lisa Baker". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lisa Baker

Senator