

Senator Lisa Baker  
Floor Remarks – Interbranch Commission  
July 6, 2009

The disgraceful judicial corruption in Luzerne County has been public knowledge for six months now. Still, there are a lot of hard questions searching for good answers. The most prevalent question is – what is being done to make sure this does not happen again, in Luzerne or anywhere else?

There is no white-washing how corrosive corruption is. In the community, public distrust of county government is alarmingly high. In a larger context, the serious and extensive wrongdoing by a couple of corrupt judges has put a substantial stain on the juvenile justice system. That is truly unfortunate, for Pennsylvania's system is nationally recognized for being filled with high-caliber, conscientious individuals.

With so many kids adversely affected, with such casual denial of fundamental constitutional protections, the Luzerne County situation cannot just be written off as a horrible aberration. We cannot run the risk that greed, intimidation, callous disregard of ethics and oaths, and criminal audacity combine in a toxic brew of wrongdoing again.

Where will the answers come from? What went wrong will be determined by ongoing investigations. What will be done to punish the wrongdoers should be decided soon as sentences are imposed. What will be done to prevent this from happening again is the purpose of the interbranch commission created in this bill.

This commission, which results from uncommon cooperation between all three branches of state government, is not interfering with or duplicating the work of investigators and the criminal justice system. Rather, it is charged with finding forward-looking remedies for the wrongs, and restoring public confidence that there is justice throughout the juvenile justice system. We want to assemble the best minds and the best hearts to provide the best answers.

To the extent that laws must be changed, rules revised, proceedings opened up, data more carefully scrutinized, this commission will put together that case. Legislators will then decide on changes in law. The courts will decide on rules changes.

By virtue of how this commission was conceived and how it will be constituted, we can trust that the end result will be reliable, responsible, and right – a better-protected, better-run system of juvenile justice.