

April 30, 2013

**Testimony of Les Neri, President,
Fraternal Order of Police, Pennsylvania State Lodge**

Good morning. My name is Les Neri. I am proud to serve as the elected President of the Fraternal Order of Police, Pennsylvania State Lodge, which represents more than 40,000 active and retired law enforcement officers and their families throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Among those 40,000 officers are almost 200 Liquor Control Enforcement Officers who assume primary responsibility for enforcement of the Liquor Code.

On behalf of the members of the Fraternal Order of Police and their families, I would like to extend my thanks to Committee Chairman McIlhinney and Democratic Chairman Ferlo, and to the other members of this Committee for welcoming our participation in the debate over the privatization and expansion of liquor sales in Pennsylvania. Given the relationship between alcohol consumption rates and crime rates, law enforcement must be included in this debate because police officers will deal with the impact of privatization each day on the streets.

The Fraternal Order of Police has opposed HB 790 because we believe that it will lead to more alcohol-related and collateral type crimes, which will create a greater risk of harm to police officers and to the civilians we are sworn to protect. The Department of Justice has repeatedly documented the clear connection between alcohol-consumption rates and crime rates. The Center for Disease Control has linked privatization of alcohol sales to increased alcohol consumption.

Pennsylvania Liquor Control Enforcement Officers conduct background investigations, undercover investigations and open inspections of licensed or unlicensed liquor establishments. They have the power and duty to arrest for violations of the Pennsylvania Liquor Code and specific Crimes Code-related offenses. Under HB 790, these specialized law enforcement officers will play a more limited role, as their duties are carved up and distributed among other already understaffed Commonwealth agencies such as the Pennsylvania State Police, which is currently 513 troopers under complement. At a time when there would be a workload increase due to increased access points and expanded liquor sales, HB 790 actually waters down law enforcement in a manner that jeopardizes public safety. This is not acceptable.

HB 790 also negatively affects local police departments by imposing an unfunded mandate on those departments to address the likely increase in alcohol-related and collateral type crimes without any additional funding or training. And let us not forget that our local police departments are already struggling to maintain adequate staffing in the wake of the economic downturn.

In closing, let me state that the FOP does not oppose common sense reforms to the liquor control and enforcement system in Pennsylvania. But given the stakes involved, we favor a more methodical approach to addressing consumer desires with an emphasis on providing enhanced manpower, training and enforcement tools to address the risks associated with alcohol consumption. Because of its likely impact on alcohol access and the incidence of alcohol-related crimes, and due to its potential to harm police officer safety and law enforcement resources, the Pennsylvania FOP opposes HB 790 Printer's Number 1246 and asks that this Committee not support its passage without consideration of the concerns raised in this testimony. Thank you for your continued support.