



Closing Statement

W. Cary Edwards

Chair

New Jersey State Commission of Investigation

Public Hearing

November 18, 2008

Thank you.

That will conclude these proceedings. But before we officially adjourn, I have just a few closing observations.

First, on behalf of my colleagues on the Commission, my thanks to the entire SCI staff for the hard work and dedication that has driven this unprecedented inquiry. I'd also like to express our gratitude to the many law enforcement officials and public servants who offered their expert assistance in this long and difficult but entirely worthwhile process. Thanks particularly to the New Jersey Department of Corrections. Although the department declined our

invitation to provide testimony in this proceeding, as is their prerogative, that does not diminish the high level of behind-the-scenes cooperation afforded us by the department's staff over many months. We have been provided with thousands of key departmental records and have met extensively with senior officials both in management and in the unions representing Corrections personnel. We know that they share our concerns in many of the areas we have examined here today.

Ladies and gentlemen, there's an old joke – and we've all heard it – that goes something like this: The good news is that we're from the government. The bad news is that we're here to help you. And certainly that unfortunate mixed message sometimes does get translated into reality.

But speaking for the SCI, the truth of the matter is that we are here to help you. We really are. As Commissioner Flicker pointed out in her opening statement this morning, we are not a “gotcha” agency. We don't point fingers and lay blame for self-promotion. At the end of the day, when all is said and done, what counts – what makes our investigations meaningful – is our ability to marshal the facts as a basis for effective recommendations to reform and improve the system.

In the coming weeks, the Commission will issue a report that will include a wide range of detailed recommendations for systemic reform in every area of our extensive inquiry. Steps already undertaken by the Corrections Department during the course of the investigation are an encouraging sign of salutary change, and we commend the department for that.

But the record is clear, convincing and urgent: Organized crime as we know it here in the 21st Century has established a series of operational outposts – if not outright strongholds – within the very walls of our state prisons. Behind bars, members of violent criminal street gangs are able to recruit and organize and communicate with cohorts on the street, almost with impunity. They can carry out financial transactions to further their criminal enterprises. They readily exploit systemic weaknesses to their advantage. Their ability to operate from within the walls raises the specter of greater violence on the streets once they return to the outside world.

That should not be.

To address these serious matters, we will draw upon the extensive findings of this investigation and upon the knowledge, expertise and experience of

Corrections officials and other key players to develop recommendations for a stronger statutory and regulatory structure. We will build upon pending legislation with the goal of providing the broadest, most effective and most efficient vehicle for practical reform. And when we are finished, we will respectfully submit our proposals to the Governor and the Legislature in the hope that they will place these issues front and center and resolve them in the best interests of the citizens of New Jersey.

Thank you. This hearing is adjourned.