



April 11, 2025

Governor Josh Shapiro  
501 North 3rd Street  
508 Main Capitol Building  
Harrisburg, PA 17120

Dear Governor Shapiro:

We are writing to express our support for Berks, Dauphin, and Lehigh Counties' collaborative efforts to establish a new regional juvenile detention center.

As you know, counties across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania are contending with a decreasing number of available beds at youth detention centers. With each passing year, this issue has worsened and is felt in all 67 counties in some form. The limited number of beds means only the most serious offenders are held in detention centers. As juvenile justice experts representing Berks, Dauphin, and Lehigh Counties explained to us, our inability to adequately detain juvenile offenders is being exploited by older criminals. Increasingly, youths are being recruited to commit crimes because it is understood that the consequences will be less severe. According to judges and district attorneys representing the three counties, youth offenders are often sentenced to electronic monitoring, which is inadequate in more serious cases.

To remedy this growing problem, leaders representing Berks, Dauphin, and Lehigh Counties have partnered to reopen the former Berks County Youth Detention Center, located at 1261 County Welfare Road, Leesport, PA, 19533. The building served as a detention center from 1995 to 2012. Once renovations are complete, the facility will house 30 beds, evenly divided among the three counties. As state lawmakers representing Berks County, we believe this is a prudent plan that will not only benefit the areas we serve but also free up space for counties not included in this partnership.

However, in order to complete this project and reopen this youth detention center, funding from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania is needed. Berks, Dauphin, and Lehigh Counties are seeking a total of \$19 million to complete renovations and ensure the facility is

capable of meeting our current needs. The three counties would then be responsible for the recurring costs associated with operating the facility, utilizing the state needs-based budget.

Thank you for considering this request and for your ongoing service to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. We are eager to work with you on this issue and explore ways to fulfill this funding request to ensure this regional effort is successful.

Sincerely,

CC: Senator Joe Pittman, Senate Majority Leader  
Representative Matt Bradford, Majority Leader  
Representative Jordan Harris, Chairman, House Appropriations Committee  
Senator Jay Costa, Senate Minority Leader  
Senator Vincent Hughes, Senate Minority Appropriations Chairman  
Representative Jesse Topper, House Minority Leader  
Representative Jim Struzzi, House Minority Appropriations Chairman  
Berks County Commissioners  
Berks County District Attorney John Adams  
Berks County Chief Operating Officer Kevin Barnhardt