

**Comments by the Honorable Janet D. Howell  
Public Safety Subcommittee  
(Friday, January 14, 2011)**

As we begin our deliberations, it's important to recognize that we've been through a truly historic downsizing in our public safety agencies since 2008.

This has not been easy, and a tremendous amount of credit is due the agencies that have worked incredibly hard to cut spending while focusing on maintaining essential services.

Fortunately, this year looks to be somewhat quieter in the public safety secretariat - maybe that's because there's not much left to cut. We have a relatively smaller number of amendments proposed by the Governor this year, and we're going to cover those this morning.

The good news for this subcommittee is that highway deaths dropped sharply again last year, and serious crime remains low in Virginia (compared to other states and compared to any year since 1965). And, our prison and jail populations, and juvenile facility populations, are not growing - for now. If you had told me - when I was first elected to the Senate - that these numbers would be this low by 2010 - I would have been truly amazed.

But we all know that we still face major fiscal challenges in public safety, from funding sufficient manpower in State Police, to adjusting to a sharp drop in state aid for local police departments and aid for local juvenile programs, to dealing with the continued crowding in our prisons, to maintaining our National Guard armories, and to meeting the needs of our veterans. And the list goes on.

I expect we're going to see a number of requests for additional funding, and frankly, this year, it's going to be extremely difficult to find any additional funds, beyond the amendments already proposed by the Governor.

This morning, our Secretary of Public Safety, Marla Decker, is here to set out her priorities in this field. Marla, as always, we're delighted to have you join us, and we appreciate the leadership that you and the Governor have provided this past year to improve our prisoner reentry programs. As I said the other day, I'm glad we're on the same page.