

**FY 2018 BUDGET TESTIMONEY
SHERIFF JEWELL WILLIAMS
OFFICE OF THE SHERIFF
April 19, 2017**

President Clarke and Members of the Committee of the Whole, I am Jewell Williams, Sheriff of the City and County of Philadelphia.

In the last year, the Sheriff's Office continued to improve its operations to best serve the City.

For years, Philadelphia failed to vigorously collect delinquent real estate taxes. This backlog put a burden on those who pay their taxes and as the backlog increased, encouraged further delinquencies. With the Law Department, we sought to decrease the backlog. In my first year in office, Sheriff's Sales collected \$27 million of delinquent taxes and fees. We now collect and forward to the City over \$60 million a year.

From three Sheriff Sales a month in 2012, we now conduct six monthly sales, including a Land Bank Sale. Even though we conduct 72 Sales a year, an additional monthly sale is being discussed with the City.

I can also report that there is evidence that the backlog of delinquent cases is at last shrinking. We still process over 27,000 properties a year, but the size of the delinquencies and the amounts collected are getting smaller. Progress is being made.

It once took up to 120 days after settlement for a property to be returned to productive use. Last year, the time between a property's sale and a new deed being available was reduced to an average of 15 days. Issuing a new deed means that the property is again producing taxes and providing a benefit to the community.

We help the people of Philadelphia in a number of ways:

Last year we conducted 35 seminars, 12 of which were in Spanish, on participating in Sheriff's Sales and preventing foreclosure. We participated in over 100 community events.

We continue to increase the opportunities to buy property at Sheriff Sales to more than just a few insiders. Each year our web site hosts over 195,000 unique visits by people researching our sales. Not only does the site provide valuable information, it contains a color photo and map of each property. The site is available to either English- or Spanish-speakers.

Historically the Sheriff's Office made no effort to find people owed refunds from the sale of their property. Last year we were able to locate 140 people owed refunds from sales and returned \$2.2 million to them. Since taking office, we have returned almost \$11 million to 407 people. This was not done before we took office.

Service goes beyond delinquent tax collections. We are taking a lead in protecting people, especially children, from accidental shootings. In cooperation with President Darrell Clark and City Council, we have given out over **2800 free** gun locks throughout the city.

I want to focus on the primary task of the Sheriff's Office: the security and protection of the Courts.

Every day our Deputies safely transport over four hundred prisoners to and from jails to Courts. Many of these defendants have a history of violence. Each year we are responsible for the safety and conduct of over 100,000 prisoners while they are in transport or on trial. This is dangerous work.

The fact that few people outside the Court system are aware of this activity shows how well our Deputies do their job.

There is further evidence of our success: Each year we are asked to take on new responsibilities.

More than a year ago we were asked to take over and properly train the forty-officer warrant unit. Today twenty-eight officers are state certified and have Deputy Officer status. Even as we wait for all the officers to become certified, in the last year the unit arrested over 4,400 fugitives.

Recently, we were asked by the Courts to provide security for the Probation and Parole offices at 1401 Arch Street. This will become the seventh Court facility we are responsible to protect.

To reduce the problem of witness and jury intimidation, the Criminal Courts asked us to participate in setting up a program to keep cell phones and cameras out of Court rooms. For years judges have sought a way to stop witnesses and victims from being harassed by cells and cameras. By sealing electronic devices in a locked pouch, their use while the owner is in a court house is now prohibited. This program began on April 3rd.

Today, the biggest issue confronting us is the security of City Hall. The building is massive with a million square feet of space, housing 700 rooms including fifty Courts, and Council operations. But with fifty points of entrance, four stairwells, and massive empty corridors, City Hall is porous from the outside and unsecured on the inside.

By increasing fees collected by the Sheriff's Office, we can offset the cost of hiring the thirty-five new Deputy Sheriff Officers required to guard this nine-story building. The hiring and training process is now underway.

With Public Property and Judge Lerner of the Managing Director's Office, we are completing a detailed plan to secure City Hall from the subway below us to the Tower above us. Implementation is our highest priority.

In the past the uniform and civilian needs of this Office were not addressed in the City's operating budgets. But since we have proven that we can meet the

demands made of us, the Kenney Administration and City Council have provided the personnel required to achieve our mandate. This budget submitted for your consideration will continue to allow us to do that in the year ahead.

Thank you.