

**Senate State Government Committee
Confirmation Hearing
May 12, 2015**

**Testimony of Acting Secretary Pedro A. Cortés
Pennsylvania Department of State**

Chairman Folmer, Chairman Williams and members of the State Government
Committee:

Good morning and thank you for the opportunity to come before you today. I will begin by telling you how deeply honored I am to return to public service and especially to the Department of State, an agency I hold dear to my heart because the work we do is so important. It is a privilege to work in a Department that promotes democracy through the electoral process, protects the health and safety of the public through professional licensing and oversight, and provides the foundation of economic development through its business registration program.

I have been a resident of Pennsylvania since 1990. As most of you know, I began my career in state government in 1993 as a caseworker with the Department of Public Welfare. To this day, my work in public welfare continues to impact my life, because it gave me a deep understanding of the value of the services that we in state government provide, especially to those in need.

I transitioned to the State Civil Service Commission where I worked as an employment counselor and recruiter until beginning law school, during which time I continued with the Civil Service Commission as a legal intern.

After obtaining my law degree, I had the opportunity to practice employment law with the Civil Service Commission until 2000, when then-Governor Tom Ridge asked me to serve as

his senior adviser for Latino affairs, heading the Governor's Advisory Commission on Latino Affairs. After 9/11, when Governor Ridge was called to Washington, I continued in that position under Governor Mark Schweiker.

In 2003, incoming Governor Ed Rendell asked me to assume the position of Secretary of the Commonwealth, a position I held from 2003 until June 2010.

During my 7½ years at the Department of State, I am proud to note that the Department successfully administered 15 primary and general elections. We cut the processing time for business documents from 36 business days to 1 day, and reduced Uniform Commercial Code filings from 27 business days to 1 day. We also instituted the nation's first statewide Electronic Notarization Program.

We made significant strides in all other areas of the Department including the work of the Bureau of Professional and Occupational Affairs. During my previous tenure, the Bureau imposed 21,292 sanctions, of which 7,847 were considered serious disciplinary actions.

In my confirmation visits with you and other members of the Senate, it was clear that the issue of the Gosnell case has been front and center in your minds. I assure you I share the same sense of outrage over that tragic occurrence.

As I have mentioned to you during our visits, this was not a complete breakdown of the Department, but the egregious fault of a few prosecutors who utterly failed to exercise their discretion to prosecute. Had they done their job, I know without a doubt the Department would have acted with appropriate urgency to stop Gosnell.

I can assure you that since those heinous events came to light, the Department of State and the Department of Health have implemented a series of safeguards to mitigate the possibility of another such case ever happening again. Supervisors now make sure they assign multiple

complaints about a licensee to the same prosecutor. Additionally, a system of checks and balances means no one person can dismiss any charge. There are multiple layers of review, including cross referencing complaints with databases such as Mcare (Medical Care Availability and Reduction of Error) and JNET (Pennsylvania Justice Network).

I have also met on several occasions with Secretary-nominee Dr. Karen Murphy at the Department of Health. She shares my commitment that we will aggressively investigate and pursue any complaint about potential violations that could jeopardize the safety of the public.

If confirmed, I assure you that everyone at the Department of State, including myself, will always be available and responsive to your issues and those of your constituents. At the Department of State, we pride ourselves on providing outstanding service to the public – service that is Accurate, Courteous and Timely. We have a team of dedicated public servants who work hard each day and I'm very proud to be a part of such a committed group of people.

I thank you again for the opportunity to come before you and I welcome your questions and comments.