



Testimony of
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Center for Rural Pennsylvania
Confronting the Heroin Epidemic in Pennsylvania

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Kovalchick Complex & Athletic Center

Thank you Chairman Yaw and The Center for Rural Pennsylvania for the opportunity to speak with you this morning about the Heroin/Opioid Epidemic in Rural Pennsylvania. My name is Patrick Dougherty, and I am the District Attorney of Indiana County. With me is Chief Detective David Rostis, who oversees Indiana County's Drug Task Force. We want to thank you for your interest in one of the single most problems affecting not only Rural Pennsylvanians but Pennsylvanians as a whole.

By way of background, in 2007, Indiana County saw very little if any heroin, our main drug was marijuana and cocaine. However, since 2008 our criminal justice and social service system have been overrun with heroin/opiod related problems. This is a public health issue as much as it is a law enforcement issue.

I would like to note that this problem will not be solved by law enforcement alone, it will take a holistic approach in that we need to educate our communities and children about the consequences that opioid addiction has on families and our community, we need to identify and provide appropriate treatment for people suffering from addiction and we need to hold those who push these drugs upon us accountable, through the passage of mandatory sentences, especially when the delivery of these drugs results in fatal overdoses.

In Indiana County, the majority of cases are handled by the Pennsylvania State Police and the Indiana Borough Police Department; however, they work alongside our county drug task force to coordinate our enforcement efforts.

So far in 2016, the Indiana County Drug Task force has initiated 40 cases dealing with the distribution of controlled substances. Over 80% of these cases are targeting mid level dealers of opioids. These numbers do not reflect arrest and cases initiated by other agencies tasked with enforcing the drug law within our jurisdiction.

We have also seen a dramatic increase in the following types of crimes associated with opioid use. Burglary, Theft, Retail Theft, Identify theft, Access Device Fraud, Driving

Under the Influence and even homicide. These types of crimes place an unneeded burden on the citizens of our county.

In order to allocate our resources in an efficient manner it became necessary for us to identify the source of the controlled substances that was being brought into our community and to understand the distribution network employed by the persons bringing their product to the street. We have learned that most of the heroin offered for sale in Indiana County primarily comes from the Pittsburgh region. Heroin is purchased relatively cheap on the streets of Pittsburgh. It is brought to Indiana County for sale at a substantial profit. For example a bundle of heroin purchased in Pittsburgh for approx sixty dollars is resold in Indiana for one hundred and fifty dollars. It is not uncommon for a street level dealer to make several thousand dollars in only a few days of dealing heroin in Indiana County.

Breaking the supply chain has proven to be a more difficult task. We have discovered that the majority of persons bringing heroin into the area are usually lower level members of larger more organized drug dealing operations. These individuals (non users) are sent to the area to make contact with local client base. They will contract with addicts from the area to provide them with a location, communications and a client base. As payment for their service this person usually receives a quantity of heroin for free. These addicted runners are the persons dealing with the users at the street level and more often than not are the targets of most investigations. The dealers from Pittsburgh are very cautious of the persons that they deal with. This type of networking offers many types of problems to law enforcement tasked to infiltrate and disband them.

Mid level street dealers have little or no ties to the area. They keep mobile by continuously changing their location and contact information. They are usually only known to people in this area by street names and they may only use that name when they are in our area. This makes it difficult to contact their home area and identify them.

They usually do not drive depending on local persons for transportation. Therefore local law enforcement is not able to ascertain vehicle information to aid in their identification.

If the mid level dealer is arrested they are immediately replaced to continue the drug supply to the area.

Our agency has recognized that we cannot fight this battle on our own. We know that in order to be successful we must use all of the tools and techniques available to us and this requires funding to put manpower on the street and to be able to purchase these drugs to build a solid case for prosecution.

We have formed a local drug task force that enables us to use local law enforcements Officers as Special County Detectives making their jurisdiction county wide. In addition, we have developed partnerships with the Pennsylvania Attorney General's Office and the United States Attorney's Office for the Western District of Pennsylvania, along with the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI). We regularly participate in OCDETF cases working with State and Federal agencies conducting investigation targeting larger drug dealing organizations.

Over the last 6 plus years we have turned part of our mission to community education. Multiple times a year our officers and staff are participating in town hall meetings, school programs, drug take back programs, in order to provide information to the community on how to identify these substances and the dangers associated with them and informing the community whom to call who to call if they suspect that these activities are going on in their neighborhoods.

We as Law Enforcement Officers must realize that we cannot enforce our way out of this problem. We must utilize all the resources given to us and partner with agencies outside of law enforcement in order to battle this drug overdose crisis.