

June 23, 2004

MEMO

To: The Honorable Mark Souder
Subcommittee on Criminal Justice, Drug Policy and Human
Resources

From: David Hudson, County Judge

Subject: Ice in the Ozarks: The Methamphetamine Epidemic in Arkansas

As Sebastian County Judge I work closely with the County legislative body, the Quorum Court, and each of the other Elected Officials involved in the Justice System. My concerns related to drug abuse focus on our “Jail” and “Juvenile Detention” facilities capacity to hold inmates, crowding due to drug offenders, jail expansion capital expenditure costs and most significantly the increased ongoing “operating expenses” from larger facilities.

We simply cannot afford to incarcerate all drug offenders. A distinction must be made between criminal violators that we are “afraid of” and those we are “mad at.” Lock up those we are afraid of and use other programs to deal with those we are mad at, such as Drug Court.

It is widely acknowledged that 80% of the individuals in the County’s Adult Detention Facility are directly or indirectly incarcerated due to some form of drug abuse. The use of methamphetamine has had a peculiar effect in the Sebastian County Criminal Justice System of increasing the number of women incarcerated as well as the overall numbers of individuals with that particular drug abuse habit.

I am advised that the current production of methamphetamine, referred to as “ice,” is 80% pure and produces a drug that can be smoked rather than

using a needle to obtain the same “high” as an intravenous injection, for the same price.

Sebastian County has implemented a Drug Court as a resource in drug treatment and was awarded a United States Department of Justice Drug Court Implementation Grant to assist in this program, which is also funded by the State of Arkansas and Sebastian County. We are seeing positive results from this program.

The County is currently in the process of expanding its Jail at a cost of \$3.5 million and an increased operating cost of a projected \$400,000 a year. The County has been able to plan on the Jail expansion without requiring a tax increase, however, any further expansion of jail operating costs will require additional revenues. The methamphetamine drug abuse problem is considered a major issue to the future expansion of the jail, continued crowding of the existing facility and a need to increase taxes to operate such a facility in the future.

Our law enforcement officers and agencies do a great job in apprehending drug abusers and the Prosecuting Attorney’s Office and Judges are effective in administering judgment to sentence these individuals to jail and prison time. However, for a certain category of these offenders this solution is an expensive proposition with a high probability and likelihood of repeat offenders continuing to exacerbate the flow of arrests, crowding of jails and prisons and related expenditures.

Drug treatment and prevention programs as facilitated by the Federal Government are an effective use of Federal tax dollars to help meet local government needs and impact our country on a national basis. I strongly endorse the use of “Drug Courts” and would like to see expansion to our “District Courts” and our “Juvenile Courts.”

Expenditure of tax resources to deal with the methamphetamine drug abuser in the areas of education, awareness and “Drug Court use of judicial sanctions to help rehabilitate” is an effective national public policy partnership with our State and Local Governments. Money spent to rehabilitate versus incarceration, when properly applied, gives us our best long term solution.

Also included in my statement are comments from other County officials knowledgeable about our Justice System and methamphetamine drug addiction.

Sincerely,

David Hudson
Sebastian County Judge

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Attachment A: Statement by Fort Smith Police Chief Randy Reed