

February 4, 2004

Dear Congressman,

Thank you for this opportunity to address this committee regarding the enormous problem that rural America is facing with methamphetamine.

In 2001, the former Noble County Sheriff Doug Dukes and I testified before this committee. We cited the growing trend of meth usage in our county. Also cited were several examples of cases that had occurred which exemplified the bizarre behavior of the meth users and the increase in violence associated with the users.

At that time, we were certain that we had not peaked in terms of methamphetamine usage and production. Unfortunately, our predictions were correct. We currently have the distinction of ranking tenth among the 92 Indiana counties in meth lab arrests. In 1996, Indiana recorded just six (6) meth labs for the entire year. This year investigators shut down 1, 260 labs throughout Indiana. This is an incredible increase. The cost for the disposal of these labs is estimated to be in excess of \$66,000 dollars. A factor not included in this figure is the cost of man-hours involved.

The statistical information regarding the increase in meth production and usage is staggering and very frightening. A recent study conducted by the Rural Indiana Profile reports that eighth graders in rural settings are 108% more likely to use meth than eighth graders in urban areas. According to the U.S. Sentencing Commission, arrests for meth offenses in Indiana rose 81% from 1995 to 1998. I cannot imagine what type of increase we have experienced since 1998.

I have known people who were drug users for years, but managed to maintain some stability in terms of employment and family. Upon discovering meth, they rapidly began to have severe problems and were unable to function as a family, or maintain a job and home. At some point, they discover the cooking process and become totally consumed with the drug. The thought process of these people is "why buy it when I can make my own and even sell some for a substantial profit". Obviously, the more people we have involved in the manufacturing of meth translates into more meth on the streets, more environmental concerns due to disposal of the waste, more thefts of anhydrous, etc.

An example of this type of scenario happened just this past week when a casual acquaintance of our family called and stated that she was filing for divorce. She has been married for several years and has three children. Her husband has smoked pot for years.

Although she did not agree with it, she tolerated it. She went on to say that he had maintained a job, and in general, had been a good provider for the family. A few months ago, she began to notice a drastic change in his behavior. He began showing up late for his children's activities and would be gone from the home at all hours of the day and night. Eventually, she found out that he was using meth. He is now unemployed and is either unable or unwilling to find a job. He has moved out of the house and is living with "friends". She is very concerned about the welfare of the children when the divorce is finalized. The children have asked her not to allow him to pick them up because they no longer feel comfortable being around him.

We have seen a dramatic increase of anhydrous ammonia thefts, not only at farm supply facilities, but at several factories that use the chemical in their production process. Employees are now committing thefts from the companies they work for.

Another area of concern for us is the establishment of an active chapter of the Outlaw Motorcycle Club in one of our neighboring counties. The Outlaws, historically, have maintained a very sophisticated methamphetamine distribution network. They are also known to absorb puppet clubs to assist them in drug distribution. This very scenario has reportedly taken place with a local motorcycle club in our county.

What more can be done to stem these meth trends? I feel we have made progress, specifically in the area of training. Our deputies, as well as the majority of police officers, firefighters and EMS personnel throughout the county, have all received training in meth. We are continually conducting awareness programs both in our schools and the community to educate everyone on the dangers of methamphetamine.

What more can be done to help us at the local level? Additional funding for training, equipment, and manpower is desperately needed. Another area of concern for us is in keeping our current police force in service. Like police departments throughout the state and country, in an effort to reduce our operating budget, we have instituted a policy of compensatory time in lieu of overtime pay. This has substantially reduced our overtime budget, but compensatory time has also reduced our total available man-hours by 2,132 for 2003. In other words, we lost over 53 weeks of manpower last year. This is a reflection of just the compensatory time off and does not include the normal vacation time off. We cannot afford to continue this cycle if we are to effectively battle the meth problems which plague our community.

In closing, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to this committee's continued concern regarding this enormous problem facing rural America.

Thank you,

Doug Harp
Chief Deputy
Noble County Sheriff's Department