

July 27, 2004

Mark E. Souder
Chairman
Subcommittee on Criminal Justice
Drug Policy and Human Resources
Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515-6143

Dear Chairman Souder:

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for your invitation to address this investigative hearing entitled, "The Poisoning of Paradise: Crystal Methamphetamine in Hawaii."

The State of Hawaii and in my personal opinion, particularly the island of Hawaii are indeed a paradise. Because of its size and economic diversity, the 4,000-square-mile Big Island of Hawaii, although incorporated as a single county, finds itself challenged. Much of the western part of the island, with its reputation as both a tourist destination and an area with many upscale residences, enjoys a higher standard of living. The eastern part of the island, lacking major industrial job providers, suffers from a reduced economy. This results in higher unemployment in the East and an abundance of lower paying service jobs in the West to which many people from the East are forced to commute on a daily basis.

The economically distinct sides of the island do share an unfortunate common trait; a large segment of their population addicted to the drug crystal methamphetamine, also commonly known by its street name of "ice." This highly addictive drug has provided suppliers and distributors from both here and abroad with a large and highly profitable market here in Hawaii.

The increased supply and demand for "ice" in the County of Hawaii is a continuous threat to the safety and welfare of the general public and is therefore a primary law enforcement concern. Our local media, elected officials, and members of the public have repeatedly stated the abuse of "ice" on the Big Island has reached epidemic levels. Our Honorable Mayor Harry Kim has publicly declared "war" on "ice."

Chairman Mark E. Souder
July 26, 2004
Page 2

We have learned through several investigations that much of the crystal methamphetamine distribution on our island can be traced back to California and Mexico, and it includes elements of the so-called Mexican Mafia.

In order to be more proactive, our Department has established two Ice Task Force units, one in East Hawaii and one here in West Hawaii. These Task Forces, comprised entirely of personnel from within our Department are in response to this growing menace to our community. We have also dedicated two telephone lines as "Ice" Hotlines for use by the public for reporting of crystal methamphetamine possession and or distribution. The primary goal of our task forces is to identify, dismantle, disrupt, arrest, and prosecute street, mid-and upper-level drug trafficking organizations and organized crime groups involved in methamphetamine distribution, methamphetamine manufacturing, and money laundering.

Although we may concentrate on the large organizations, even "ice" houses have been targeted although the quantities of "ice" recovered is small at times. Removal of the occupants of the house is primary, as the high rate of domestic violence, parental neglect and property crimes, which occur within these neighborhoods, becomes a form of social terrorism which is unacceptable.

A secondary yet perhaps more crucial goal is to have our task force personnel maintain a drug prevention and educational program in our schools and community. Our department seeks to remain both connected to our community and hopeful for their continuing support in reporting suspected "ice" dealers and sharing a vision that together we can overcome this peril, which seeks to rob our youth of their future and our elderly of their possessions, which are often stolen to support "ice" addicted persons. We firmly believe this is not an effort in futility, but rather a partnership towards an eventual victory.

Our efforts to date have disrupted the activities of several large drug organizations on the Island of Hawaii. In conjunction with Federal agents and attorneys, we have prosecuted the leaders of these organizations in Federal Court. Additionally, in concert with community partners we have participated in roadside sign waving campaigns to bring further attention to the problem and to seek additional community support.

Chairman Mark E. Souder
July 26, 2004
Page 3

Our seizures of crystal methamphetamine have increased from 2.6 pounds in 2002 to 13.5 pounds in 2003, as well as 6.5 pounds through June of this year. This may not sound like a huge amount in terms of volume, but it is important to know street-level "ice" sales often deal in tenth of a gram quantities.

We understand no recitation of statistical data in terms of seizures, numbers of cases and/or arrests can compare to the agony and pain suffered by relatives and friends of "ice" users. In June of this year we conducted a daytime search warrant raid on a suspected ice dealer. What was found aside from the "ice"-using suspect, and a quantity of "ice", were the suspect's six children ranging in age from 5 to 17 none was at school on that day. When asked by a detective why they were not in school, they indicated they had wanted to go but their mother could not be awakened to take them. There are numerous documented accounts or incidents that have taken place whereby crimes of violence have occurred to infants, and spouses due to the use of "ice".

I am aware the purpose of this hearing is to examine the problem of methamphetamine trafficking and abuse and how we on the local level in partnership with the Federal Government can address this problem.

In terms of methamphetamine trafficking, as an island state we are dependent upon the maritime and aviation industries for all of our imported goods, and based on our intelligence most of our "ice" is imported in the same manner. Our State Supreme Court has interpreted our State Constitution as forbidding local law enforcement from utilizing the "Walk and Talk" method of drug interdiction which is both allowed and used by Federal agents. Our island, about the size of the state of Connecticut, currently has only one fulltime Drug Enforcement Administration agent and two agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, all located on the East side of our island but no presence on the West side. We do have two FBI agents on the West side of the island, but none in the East. We believe a larger presence in terms of Federal Law Enforcement Agents on our island working with Hawaii Police Department personnel will help to slow the importation of "ice".

Chairman Mark E. Souder
July 26, 2004
Page 4

Approximately 82 percent of all cases assigned to our Crime Laboratory are for drug analysis, including analysis for other state and certain Federal Agencies. Because of its age and limited space our Crime Laboratory will never be confused with that of the CSI television show. We have had Federal assistance in the past in terms of funding for new equipment, but a state of the art Crime Laboratory designed in the mid-1970's is hard-pressed to keep up with the 21st Century technology available to those who reap massive profits, estimated at 300 to 400 percent here in Hawaii, from the illicit manufacture and subsequent sales of crystal methamphetamine. We are in need of Federal financial assistance to improve and expand our Crime Lab.

Since February 2000, a number of joint federal, state and local law enforcement operations targeting specific drug trafficking organizations have resulted in significant drug seizures, drug-related arrests and forfeitures in Hawaii County alone. We believe continuing results of these types of investigations can only be achieved through additional manpower and federal law enforcement support with a primary focus on stemming the importation and distribution of crystal methamphetamine in the State of Hawaii.

Thank you for allowing me this opportunity to provide testimony today.

Sincerely,

LAWRENCE K. MAHUNA
POLICE CHIEF