

**The House Judiciary Committee
Subcommittee on Courts**

**Public Hearing - House Bill 2165
Drug Trafficking Sentencing and Penalties**

**Submitted by
Detective John Ator
Lancaster County District Attorney's Office
Lancaster County Drug Enforcement Task Force
August 29, 2000**

I. Introduction

I would like to thank the House Judiciary Committee for the opportunity to address a problem that is of concern to Lancaster County and the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. I have been a Law Enforcement Officer for 31 years. I am retired from the Pennsylvania State Police after 25 years, with the rank of Corporal. I have served with the Pennsylvania State Police as a Criminal Investigator, Assistant Fire Marshall and Supervisor for the Troop J Vice Narcotics Unit my last 7 years. The majority of my cases involved drug investigations. I have found that there is a propensity for guns with drug dealers to protect their turf and their wares.

In my capacity as a Supervisor of the Troop J Vice Narcotics Unit the majority of my investigations were for drugs in Lancaster and Chester Counties. There is a propensity of drugs and guns going hand-in-hand. Drug dealers used the guns to protect their drugs, their turf and enforce payment for their drugs. The current penalties for drug dealers who possess firearms are archaic. This is known by the drug dealers who are not ignorant to the laws. They understand the mandatory sentences for possessing large amounts of controlled substances and know that the penalties of having a handgun is no more than a slap on the hand. As a deterrent for drug dealers armed on our streets we need House Bill 2165. As a Police Officer to enforce our laws and help our Communities to be safer for others, I support the enacting of House Bill 2165.

Weapon Seizures

If I might share with you the results of the Lancaster County Drug Enforcement Task Force for the past four years to present:

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| 1996 | 142 Search Warrants were executed. Seized during these Search Warrants were nine (9) handguns; five (5) semi-automatic handguns; and seven (7) rifles/shotguns--for a total of twenty-one (21) weapons. |
| 1997 | 161 Search Warrants were executed. Seized during these Search Warrants were seventeen (17) handguns; eleven (11) semi-automatic handguns; and seven (7) rifles/shotguns--for a total of thirty-five (35) weapons. |
| 1998 | 140 Search Warrant were executed. Seized during these Search Warrants were fourteen (14) handguns; fifteen (15) semi-automatic handguns; and five (5) rifles/shotguns--for a total of thirty-four (34) weapons. |
| 1999 | 99 Search Warrants were executed. Seized during these Search Warrants were seventeen (17) handguns; four (4) semi-automatic handguns; and three (3) rifles/shotguns--for a total of twenty-four (24) weapons. |

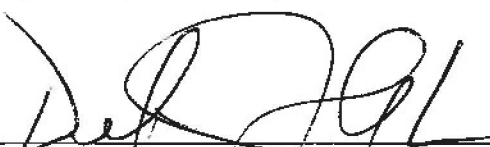
We have an expectancy on every Search Warrant to be served that there is a gun behind every door, or a gun in the hand of every street dealer where an Undercover Officer is making a hand-to-hand purchase of drugs.

Investigative Incidents

1. An Undercover Officer making hand-to-hand purchases from a street dealer. When arrested, the street dealer is found to be in possession of a loaded semi-automatic weapon in the waistband of his trousers.
2. Lancaster County Drug Enforcement Task Force Detectives observed a young individual on the street corner with a handgun protruding from his back pocket. When confronted and arrested he was found to be possessing twelve (12) bags of marijuana for street sale. Only then did Detectives learn that the individual was a juvenile.
3. An investigation of a high level drug dealer, who is a purveyor of large amounts of crack cocaine in Lancaster County, was arrested. A search of his vehicle revealed a large cache of crack cocaine and a loaded semi-automatic handgun hidden in a secret compartment in his vehicle. It was learned then that the semi-automatic was stolen in a burglary in March, 2000.
4. During the execution of a Search Warrant of a small apartment for a heroin dealer, found were seven (7) grams of uncut heroin and a Tech 9 semi-automatic assault weapon--loaded with a thirty (30) round magazine.

If I may reiterate, as a result of the before-mentioned situations, and keeping in mind the safety of our Police Offices who are on the front line and the safety of our citizens, I fully pledge support of House Bill 2165.

Respectfully submitted,



John Ator, Detective
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Lancaster County Drug Enforcement Task Force