

**House Judiciary Committee - Subcommittee on Courts**  
**Public Hearing - House Bill 2165 (Bard) - Drug Trafficking Sentencing and Penalties**

**TESTIMONY**

**Lori Jo Salomon**

**President, Lancaster Council of Neighborhoods**

My name is Lori Jo Salomon. My husband and I have been residents of Lancaster City for 14 years. We live, work, worship and educate our two children in the City of Lancaster. I have been a block captain in my neighborhood association since 1994 and President of the Lancaster Council of Neighborhoods since February of this year.

The Lancaster Council of Neighborhoods is the Council comprised of all the Neighborhood Crime Watch block captains in Lancaster City and Township. After having been inactive for five years, Mayor Charlie Smithgall reinstated the Council this past February. The Council meets on the first Tuesday of every month here in this room.

When the reinstated Council began having regular meetings in March, there were 98 organized blocks incorporated into 90 Neighborhood Watch groups throughout Lancaster City and Township. The discrepancy in numbers is due to the fact that many Neighborhood Watch groups are made up of more than one block. Working with the Crime Prevention Unit of our Police Department we offer these groups the education and resources they need in order to work together, and with their Neighborhood Policing Officers, on crime and quality of life issues in their own neighborhoods. Our groups are taught that Neighborhood Watch is about getting to know your neighbors (without being nosy), in order to be aware of who does and does not belong in your neighborhood and what is and what is not "normal" activity. It is about taking active crime prevention measures in order to prevent crime before it happens and about knowing how to properly report crime if it does occur. Neighborhood Crime Watch groups are the eyes and ears of our police department.

Just five months after our first formal meeting, the Council of Neighborhoods now has 138 blocks included in our 113 Neighborhood Watch organizations. In rapidly growing numbers we, the residents of Lancaster, are declaring that we are willing to do our part to prevent and fight crime. We have had enough of the violence that is threatening to tear apart our community and, indeed, has already destroyed many of our neighborhoods. We are ready to do whatever is required of us to take back ownership of our neighborhoods and return them to the safe, clean, peaceful places they once were and can be again. However, without enforceable legislation that supports our commitment to take back our streets, without tougher mandatory penalties for the criminals who victimize our neighborhoods, our efforts are, and will continue to be, in vain.

It is no secret that the first half of the year 2000 was a violent one in Lancaster. An innocent young mother of three children was murdered when she was caught in the crossfire between what appears to be a shootout over drug turf. Young, innocent children at one of our elementary schools were put in grave danger when drug related gunfire broke out just off school property

right before school was about to let out for the day. Guns and drugs are a dangerous and deadly combination. They destroy innocent lives, peaceful neighborhoods and the good reputations of entire cities. We have waited far too long to adopt tough legislation on the state level that makes it perfectly clear that drugs and guns are no longer acceptable in any way, shape or form in any community in the State of Pennsylvania. Those who continue to choose to carry a firearm and be involved in the illegal drug business must also be willing to accept the fact that being caught and convicted will mean, in no uncertain terms, that they will be required to serve a mandatory *minimum* five year prison sentence. No parole, no time off for good behavior, no early release... lenient options that too many of our criminals not only count on but too often receive.

Our current laws provide precious little incentive for witnesses to come forward. Many crimes go unreported and many witnesses refuse to become involved due to the absurdly lenient sentences given even the most violent criminals. "No one saw anything" is becoming a disturbingly common statement in newspaper articles reporting crimes that have occurred in Lancaster. There are law-abiding, community minded citizens who fail to see the point in sticking their neck out to report a crime and give their testimony, as a witness in a court of law. They know that the criminals against whom they testify will not only serve little or no prison time but will be right back on the same streets again, committing the same crimes, terrorizing the same neighborhoods. This legislation before you, House Bill 2165, holds the promise of reversing this way of thinking. With the assurance that these criminals will be serving significant jail sentences, and will be removed from our streets for many years, greater numbers of residents who witness crimes or know drug dealers who carry firearms will come forward and tell what they know and what they have witnessed.

House Bill 2165 also holds the promise of serving as a serious deterrence to would-be violent criminals. All of us by now are aware of the incredible success of Project Exile in Richmond, Virginia. The assurance that carrying an illegal gun would mean a mandatory minimum prison sentence of five years in Federal prison resulted in a significant drop in the number of violent crimes and in the number of criminals carrying guns. Drug dealers who had previously made a habit of carrying a weapon began to choose not to do so because they knew what the penalties were, and they knew those penalties were severe. Unfortunately, due to the lack of resources and manpower, the benefit of these Federal laws is not available to every community who needs and wants to use them. Passing state laws that mimic the Federal laws would allow *all* communities in Pennsylvania to reap the benefits of these tough mandatory sentences and take violent criminals off our streets for a significant number of years. The time has come to truly mean it when we say, "If you do the crime, you must do the time."

The residents of Pennsylvania deserve safe, clean, peaceful communities in which to live, work and raise families, and we can accomplish this if our laws will stand behind us and support our efforts with tough, mandatory penalties for convicted criminals. Our communities are crumbling under the violence born of the lethal combination of guns and drugs. Please, give us the tools we need to take back our neighborhoods and our communities from those who are currently our most violent criminals, the drug dealers with guns. We are doing our part. It is time for you to do yours. Please adopt House Bill 2165.