

## Testimony of Chief William M. Heim

Intro: William M. Heim, Chief of the Lancaster City Bureau of Police

I would like to express my appreciation for the opportunity to address you today.

### Overview of crime in Lancaster

Generally, Lancaster has been following the nationwide trend. The city has experienced a decrease in overall crime over the past several years. Burglaries, Thefts, and Assaults have declined. Police are also paying more attention to the less serious crimes, often called Quality of Life violations, those that interfere with people's ability to enjoy their neighborhoods. The city has been innovative in its plan to fight crime and disorder, and some of the programs it has instituted have become models for other cities.

Currently, we have formulated a strategic plan for reducing crime that includes over 70 specific action steps. Some of these steps call for tougher laws and penalties.

Several years ago, in response to gang and drug violence, Lancaster became the pilot city for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Weed and Seed initiative, under the leadership of Lieutenant Governor Mark Schweiker and my predecessor Chief Michael Landis. As part of this initiative, the city began special street patrols, using experienced police officers on overtime, designed to combat street level drug sales and the gun violence that often results from drug turf disputes and drug ripoffs. The officers used a variety of techniques to catch criminals in the act. They made a lot of good arrests for drug violations, firearm violations, and various other offenses. For a time, these patrols were very successful in separating drug dealers from the weapons they usually carried and used to ply their trade. Homicides and shooting incidents declined.

Recent Pennsylvania Superior and Supreme Court decisions have significantly curtailed some of the techniques these officers relied on to make these arrests and to keep our streets safe. For example, the court has limited the ability of police to respond to citizen complaints about persons carrying concealed guns. Concerned citizens in high crime neighborhoods

often call police and tell them a certain person is carrying a concealed firearm while standing on a public sidewalk or walking down a street. They don't want to give the police or the dispatcher taking the call their name and address for fear of reprisal from the offender or his accomplices if the caller is identified. In the past, based on the description of the suspect and the location given, officers would stop and frisk the individual, and frequently find a weapon where the caller said it would be. The court has ruled that such action is not legal if the caller's identity is not known to the authorities. Not only does this ruling handcuff prudent police response to a citizen's concerns, it presents significant safety hazards to officers who now have to approach this suspect in a casual manner and ask him if he is carrying a firearm, with no authority to compel him to answer. Decisions like this make it more difficult to protect our community.

We are finding that gun violence among drug dealers and gang members is on the rise. Guns have become the weapons of choice to settle disputes and even warning shots are frequently fired on our public streets to scare rival drug factions. Gun violence has risen an estimated 50% this year over last. A Lancaster police officer was shot and wounded in February of this year while police were apprehending several suspects for felony violations. Lancaster police took strong, proactive measures to stem this trend, and things have calmed down a bit.

However, over the last two and three quarter years, we had 22 homicides in the city. Twelve of these had a direct drug connection. All of these homicides were committed with firearms. There were a couple of others in which a dispute over drugs was suspected to be a factor.

During a six-month period in 1999, we had 22 people shot in Lancaster and another 133 calls of gunshots fired on city streets. We found damage from bullets and/or spent shell casings at many of these calls. During the period from March through June of this year, we had 26 shootings. This year, calls of shots fired in the city has become an almost daily occurrence. Most of them are in areas where drug dealing is a frequent problem. Most of the shootings had a drug connection. Most of the offenders and most of the victims had prior arrests and contacts with the police. Fortunately, strong police action this summer has slowed the rate of violence, but more permanent solutions need to be found.

The neighborhoods experiencing frequent encounters with drug dealers and violence are not the only persons suffering. As police respond and investigate homicides and aggravated assaults, it forces us to dedicate far too many man-hours and resources to solving violent crimes involving drug dealers and users. So much investigative time is spent on these crimes, including lengthy court preparation and testimony, that little is left to investigate other serious crimes in the city. Therefore, our citizens who have their homes and businesses burglarized, their cars stolen, or their property damaged by vandals don't always get the service they deserve. In addition, we don't solve enough of these crimes and too many thieves and vandals are on the street, further damaging the quality of life for our good citizens.

But by far, the most frustrating thing for police and citizens alike is seeing convicted drug and firearms offenders back on city streets after only a brief stay in jail. For a sustained crime reduction strategy to be successful, we must remove serious offenders from the communities they hurt for longer periods of time. Neighborhoods deserve at least that much. Police are working very hard to make the city safer. We need your assistance to help alleviate some of these problems with drug spurred violence. I sincerely believe that stiffer penalties for carrying guns while engaged in dealing drugs will result in less violence in our city. I hope you will pass house Bill #2165.

Thank you