

## House Labor Committee Informational Hearing

House Bill 2585, September 9, 2010

Testimony, Ronald E. Russ

Citizen, Forest County

Members of the Labor Relations Committee, I want to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to speak on behalf of the Sheriff of Forest County, the citizens and all Sheriff's across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. This is a subject I feel a very personal connection to and therefore very strongly about.

Allow me to introduce myself to you, my name is Ronald E. Russ and I have been a resident of Forest County from 1934 until 1952. I was then an absentee owner of property from 1966 until 1992 and from that time to the present have once again been a resident of Forest County. When I was a boy, Butch Ellis was the Sheriff of Forest County and that man knew everyone in the county. He drove every road within the County and would stop in and have coffee at random with various individuals. Sometimes the individuals were law-abiding citizens, sometimes the person had a shaky reputation, the key is, the Sheriff was and continues to be able to connect with all people in a way that no State Trooper or Municipal Police Officer ever could. It is so effective to have that personal connection with the residents of your county. People like feeling that their County Sheriff knows them and cares about their well being and safety. I have witnessed Sheriff Wolfgang as well as his predecessor Sheriff Tucker at a number of various community events and have seen the people surround them. The people flock to them and every one wants a word with their Sheriff. From these personal observations and speaking with residents and visitors to the county alike, the people in Forest County believe the Sheriff is "their Sheriff". Because of the personal relationship the people have with their Sheriff, he is trusted and respected by them more than any other law enforcement a community may have. We must restore the Sheriff's authority so that he can provide us with the protection the residents expect. They will talk with the Sheriff and share information with him that he should be allowed to pursue or investigate to the best of his ability.

Our present Sheriff, Bob Wolfgang, upon entering office in 2002 promised to clean up the drug problem, DUI offenders and burglaries that were becoming so prevalent in our area. Most seniors in the county were afraid to walk the streets. Our county was hit hard with the meth problem and our sheriff was able to clean it up. I, personally, have witnessed the EFFECTIVENESS Sheriff Wolfgang has had! Myself, along with many people I have had conversations with are extremely pleased with the job he has been able to do, up until his authority has come into question. Again, we must restore his authority so that he and his deputies can get back to doing what they are trained to do.

The sheriff's office is also well known for the many school and scouting programs they put on for the youth in our county. Through programs like Deputy Phil, Eddie Eagle, Summer Day Camp and Youth Field Days the sheriff is able to establish a connection with the youth that will

carry over into their adulthood. It enables him to be a person they trust and they are not afraid to contact if they have problems or questions.

Our Sheriff, has contracted patrols with the U.S. Forest Service, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Tionesta Borough, these patrols allow the Sheriff's Patrol Units to be seen on rural roads and areas that never see a State Car unless a specific incident has occurred. It generates a feeling of security and I absolutely believe it deters criminal activity to routinely see Sheriff's Patrol Vehicles in these areas!

Why are the Chiefs of Police and Municipal Police agencies against restoring the Sheriff's powers? What are they going to do for the citizens of Forest County? When we need protection, how are they going to help us? I want to know the reason they are against this. I also do not see how restoring the authority of the Sheriff will raise taxes. The Sheriff is answerable to the people. If they do not like what he is doing or intends to do, they can vote him out at the next election or make it so uncomfortable for him that he must consider his actions carefully; this makes him more accountable than any other police agency out there. Once again, the people in my community and myself consider the Sheriff in rural Pennsylvania to be the most effective law enforcement officer. I highly recommend that his authority be restored to what it was under Common Law! Please vote yes to support House Bill 2585 and restore the authority to the sheriff's and their deputies across the state. We need our sheriff working for us to maintain the safety and well being of our county.