

Patrick Dougherty
Indiana County District Attorney

House Judiciary Committee
Public Hearing on Heroin epidemic
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Greensburg, PA 15601

Two years ago, our community lost a young man from a well off family to a heroin overdose and at his funeral his mother turned to his heroin addicted sister and asked her if this would wake her up and get clean. She responded to her grieving mother I can handle my heroin he got greedy. Less than a year later she is still alive but was convicted of multiple felonies for her involvement in a burglary ring to feed her habit. This story is now more common than ever and we need to attack this epidemic from all fronts prevention, treatment and prosecutions.

The rise in crime in Indiana County over the last 5 years is almost single handedly as a result of the heroin and opiate abuse. However, these crimes don't just show up as drug act violations, they show up as thefts, home invasions, burglaries and robberies, retail thefts, and DUI's just to name a few.

Historically, cocaine and marijuana were the main drugs in Indiana County. Over the last 5 years 80% of our resources expended deal with heroin prosecutions. For example 93% of our Drug Treatment Court participants have a heroin or opiate addiction. This program is a specialized Court that looks to rehabilitate instead of incarcerate and has graduated over 30 people, who are now employed and paying taxes and caring for their children.

The cost to conduct heroin investigations is very expensive, to purchase a bundle of heroin (10 bags) is \$120.00 and this amount is much less than in 2000 when a bundle cost \$250.00, but with the lower cost it creates more access to the drug. For enforcement purposes we need to purchase more product to bolster search warrants or to attempt to get mandatory weight for sentencing purposes.

Many times people become more addicted to opiates due to a legitimate need, but eventually the prescriptions stop and these people turn to the black market for the pills but this soon becomes cost prohibitive. The cost of 10 oxycodone pills is \$300.00 so they turn to the cheaper more accessible option, heroin.

In 2001/2002 in Indiana County the Drug & Alcohol Commission referred 20 clients for inpatient heroin addiction treatment and in 2012/13 they have referred 289 clients so far.

So what do we do? It is important to create a prescription drug database so that prescribers and pharmacists can share what drugs people are taking to cut down on doctor and pharmacy shopping. Therefore, I ask you to please pass House Bill 1694. Also, penalties for opiate prescription drugs should mirror that of heroin penalties because many times the amount of prescription medications is as potent as heroin. In addition, the penalties for heroin need to be based on the dosage units and not the weight because the amount of heroin needs to be in excess of 100 bags to get close to a mandatory sentence.

In addition, we have become proactive in trying to get unused prescription drugs off the streets by going bi-annually to our senior centers and collecting unused drugs. Furthermore, we are attempting to place permanent drug collection boxes throughout our county.

In response to this epidemic we have created a series of town hall meetings to educate the community on the signs of heroin working collectively with our Drug & Alcohol Commission, coroner, law enforcement, treatment providers, and EMS so that the public knows what to look for.

So as I sit here today, heroin is running rampant while our resources have been cut dramatically. In 1992, we received almost \$108,000.00 for drug task force funding today we receive approximately \$70,000.00. Funding needs increased to fight this battle for overtime funds and evidence procurement. Also, these rings are not limited to my county, these organizations stretch across multiple counties and resources need to be available and counties need to work together. When we work together we get great results. In 2012, through the efforts of the Pennsylvania State Police, FBI, Cambria County Drug Task Force and the Indiana County Drug Task Force we took out a heroin distribution ring that stretched all the way to Detroit Michigan. When we have resources and work together great results happen.

I want to thank the committee for taking the time to address this serious issue facing our communities.