

Testimony of
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Though courtesy necessitates that I graciously welcome you today to the City of Rutland, and I sincerely do extend the community's warmest regards, it would be disingenuous to say that I'm glad that you are here. The reality is that I wish that you did not have to be.

I wish that our community were not plagued with the scourge of illicit drug abuse and addiction that has been creeping across rural America. I wish that our community had not fallen prey to the crime that so often accompanies interstate drug activity. And I wish that we could blissfully say: "Drug related violence? Not here." and have it be true. But the cold reality is that this community, like so many others throughout our nation, has a drug problem and we need not only local but nationwide solutions in order to be successful in combating this curse.

When your Committee visit was announced, there were local officials who were somewhat distraught over the prospect of hosting a United States Senate Judiciary hearing on drug related crime. They were concerned about public perception and the prospect of negative press at a time when Rutland needs to highlight its assets in order to compete during an economic downturn. But I contend that it is infinitely wiser to admit that our City is, like many cities throughout the State, the Northeast region, and the nation, in a fierce struggle for both its community identity and the public's safety.

The first step to reversing any destructive behavior is to admit that there is a problem. Self-denial is by far our greatest threat. The City of Rutland and the State of Vermont already have the necessary building blocks to battle this scourge. We have a very aggressive law enforcement community. We have progressive prevention and treatment programs. And we have a realistic and engaged population that is not sticking its collective head in the sand and pretending that no problems exist.

But what we do need are tools and resources. We are dealing with a true interstate and national problem that requires federal support. The Senate Judiciary committee however need not reinvent the wheel because you've already proved that you know what the problem is and how to address it. Through the Senate passage of S. 456: The Gang Abatement and Prevention Act of 2007, you and your fellow committee members have created a blueprint for effective interdiction efforts through enforcement, prevention and intervention programs. Federal initiatives like S. 456, statewide initiatives like Pennsylvania's "Weed and Seed" Program, and local initiatives like "Rutland United Neighborhoods" are key to any community's success in its struggle against drug abuse and the crimes it brings. But law enforcement and prevention programs are only as successful as the funding that is made available to pay for them and, unfortunately, the funding burden is falling more and more on the local municipalities.

In a few short years, direct federal funding to municipalities has been subject to significant reductions. The Byrne Justice Assistance Grant Program, which local municipalities throughout the State and region have relied upon to keep control of their streets, is but a fraction of what is needed and what should be allocated as we continue to cope with both local and interstate illegal activities. In short, we need your help so we can help ourselves. Rutland is blessed with a beautiful downtown core, a dedicated professional workforce, and one of the finest educational systems in the state, but all of its combined assets are worthless if our neighborhoods are, or simply just feel, unsafe.

I want to thank you for allowing us the privilege of being part of finding the solution to a national crisis, and I am very confident that you will find the ensuing boots-on-the-ground testimony to be enlightening, constructive and valuable. We all understand the gravity of this widespread problem, and wish you Godspeed in your efforts as you help us find a way out.