

Testimony of

Angela S. Baker

December 5, 2008

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony at the Senate Committee on the Judiciary's hearing on "Community-Based Solutions to Drug-Related Crime in Rural America" scheduled for December 5, 2008 at City Hall in St. Albans Vermont.

My name is Angela S. Baker and I am a Substance Abuse Prevention Consultant for the Vermont Department of Health, Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Programs. I am part of a network of 10 regional Prevention Consultants charged with providing information, training, assistance with program planning, consultation and community organization to communities. The goal of the Prevention Unit is to increase local capacity to carry out substance abuse initiatives. I serve the geographic area of Franklin and Grand Isle Counties.

The Prevention Unit of the Division of Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program receives funding from the Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant, a federal funding source administered by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA). This Block Grant is the foundation of Vermont's substance abuse prevention and treatment system, and supports much of the infrastructure, including the Prevention Consultants, local prevention programs and staff in our Central Office in Burlington. It is critically important to maintain/enhance this block grant for Vermont, particularly in these difficult budget times. This critical foundation of federal support enables the Prevention Consultants to work directly within the communities we serve. In Fiscal Year 2008, the Prevention Consultants had a direct reach to 15,000 Vermonters through the provision of technical assistance, consultation, training, education, etc.

My goal in providing this written testimony is to highlight the importance of the ongoing prevention efforts currently taking place in the St. Albans community and surrounding region that seek to address

the challenges associated with substance abuse. We know that prevention is most likely to succeed if multiple actions are employed and sustained over time. The testimony provided below centers around three key substance abuse strategies: community-based process, early intervention and education.

Community-Based Process: Community level prevention works best when community members are committed and involved. At the local level, we are able to build strong relationships with our partners that helps solidify our commitment to working together toward more positive outcomes for our youth and families. Our community-based process to prevention is best exemplified by the ongoing efforts of our two anti-drug coalitions that are funded by Drug-Free Communities Support Program from SAMHSA. Franklin County Caring Communities (see www.fcccp.org for more information on this coalition) is currently in its' second five-year grant cycle and receives approximately \$95,000 per year. The Grand Isle County Clean Team is in the third year of its first grant cycle and receives approximately \$65,000 per year. Both of these grants provide funding for community organization and initiatives to help prevent and reduce substance abuse. Examples of successful community initiatives carried out by these coalitions include:

- o Implementation of Town Hall Meeting on Underage Drinking in April 2008. This initiative brought 700 parents and students together to discuss challenges associated with underage alcohol use.

- o Promotion of "A Day to Eat Dinner with Your Family" annually in September encourages parental engagement and positive communication as a substance abuse prevention strategy.

- o Implementation of "Guiding Good Choices", an evidenced-based prevention curriculum that provides parents with the skills they need to ensure the future well-being of their children.

- o Allocation of \$20,000 in Youth Initiated Grants funds for prevention initiatives created and implemented by youth in our community that address issues associated with substance abuse.

Early Intervention: Early Intervention also plays a key role in substance abuse prevention in our community. There are currently nine Student Assistance Professionals ("SAPs") in schools in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties. SAPs provide educational presentations that help prevent substance use, provide early intervention services to identify students with problems, coordinate support groups to help students cope with substance use, and refer students to community programs for treatment. By being located within the school, SAPs help to build better linkages among students, their families, school personnel, and community service agencies. The SAPs play a key role in substance abuse prevention efforts in our community.

Education: Franklin and Grand Isle Counties are known for providing a multitude of free educational opportunities for community members on issues related to substance abuse prevention. Examples of training initiatives include the following:

- o Drug Impairment Training for Educational Professionals ("DITEP"). This two-day training provides education around drug impairment signs and symptoms and available resources in the community for students who may have a substance abuse problem. This training is provided at no expense by our law enforcement partners who are Drug Recognition Experts .

- o Community Conference on Prescription Drugs. This conference will be held in St. Albans on May 9, 2009. This Conference is sponsored by the Chronic Pain and Narcotics Community Forum Workgroup led by Northwestern Medical Center. The purpose of the Conference is to bring community members together to provide education and resources and promote ongoing dialogue about challenge of prescription drug abuse in our community.

The grassroots community prevention efforts are working in our community. According to our Youth Risk Behavior Survey data, we have seen declines in nearly every drug category in Franklin County, including the following:

- o 9% decrease in the number of students who have consumed alcohol in the past 30 days (50% in 1999 down to 41% in 2007)

- o 13% decrease in the number of students who are drinking before the age of 13 (37% in 1999 down to 24% in 2007)

- o 19% decrease in the number of students who have smoked cigarettes in the past 30 days (36% in 1999 down to 17% in 2007)

- o 11% decrease in the number of students who have used marijuana in the past 30 days (29% in 1999 down to 18% in 2007)

It takes a combination of actions, sustained over time, to prevent and reduce substance abuse. Prevention strategies are most likely to succeed if they reach both individuals and the environments in which people live and work - family, school and community. We are extremely proud of the

collaboration in Franklin and Grand Isle Counties that has enabled us to "view the bigger picture" of prevention in our community and consider how the different pieces (prevention/education, treatment and enforcement) fit together to form a comprehensive plan to address drug-related issues in our community.

Despite our successes, we know that there is still a great deal of work that needs to be done. We encourage your committee to consider the importance of funding primary prevention efforts (such as community anti-drug coalitions) and early intervention efforts (including school based professionals) for individuals at risk for substance abuse. If we can be more proactive in our efforts, we can help prevent problems before they occur in our community.

Statements

Witness Testimony

The Honorable Peter Welch

The Honorable Martin Manahan

Gary L. Taylor

Dr. Fred Holmes

Angela S. Baker

Peter DesLauriers

Member Statements

The Honorable Patrick Leahy