

Testimony of

Gary L. Taylor

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TESTIMONY OF ST. ALBANS CITY POLICE CHIEF GARY L. TAYLOR SENATE COMMITTEE HEARING ON
"COMMUNITY-BASED SOLUTIONS TO DRUG-RELATED CRIME IN RURAL AMERICA" December 5, 2008

I would like to start by thanking you (Senator Leahy) and the other distinguished members of the Senate Judiciary Committee for providing me with the privilege and opportunity to appear before you to discuss the rise of drug-related violent crime in rural America, more specifically here in St. Albans, Vermont. My testimony will focus on our increased violent crime rate, increased criminal drug activity and the law enforcement responses.

I have been the St. Albans Police Chief since 2005 after having spent nearly 28 years in law enforcement in Chittenden County, just 20 minutes south of our community. My wife and I have lived in St. Albans since 1986. We raised our children in this community. I was very familiar with overall community issues even before being appointed Police Chief. The quality of life here in St. Albans and throughout Vermont has always been a key consideration about where I, as a police officer, a parent and a citizen have chosen to live and work. The proliferation of drug use and the related violent crime in our community has challenged the quality of life in our community and nearly overwhelmed our law enforcement resources.

We are facing the temporary closure and ultimate transformation of our regional correctional center from housing male arrestees to an all female facility which will not accept male arrestees. This will require the already thinly stretched police officers covering our community to leave their patrol areas

and our community unprotected in order to transport these individuals to other facilities located outside of our region throughout the state.

With that I would like to briefly provide you with some background and share with you what we have experienced in our community over the past few years.

VIOLENT CRIME TRENDS AND FORECAST Over the past 7 years the City of St. Albans has experienced:

- ? Overall increase of 36% for police incidents
- ? 87% increase in Property Crimes
- ? 125% increase in Assaults and Robberies.
- ? 186% increase in Drug Investigations and Search Warrants

It is abundantly clear that we are experiencing a dramatic increase in criminal violence, illicit drug activity, property crimes associated with illicit drug activity and use, as well as "gang-like" activity in the City of St. Albans.

ILLICIT DRUG ACTIVITY:

Historically Franklin County has seen little organized criminal drug enforcement and intervention efforts. Much of this can be attributed to the minimal law enforcement presence throughout the County. Franklin County's historical demographics are that of a rural, agricultural region, located just north, west of the State's largest metropolitan area, Chittenden County. There is a tremendous amount of poverty, illiteracy and substance abuse in Franklin County, thus there is a vulnerable target population for emerging illicit drug dealers. We are immediately south of an International border where organized illicit drug activity is widespread and growing at an alarming rate, and a short drive from New York State. Both Montreal and the State of New York are major source areas in our region of the U.S. The recent, high profile seizures of large quantities of Ecstasy being smuggled south across our northern border is further evidence of the growing criminal drug problems we face in this region.

Chittenden County Drug Enforcement Efforts:

Shared intelligence gathering with Chittenden County police agencies indicates that: Chittenden County presently has the largest number of drug investigators and drug enforcement operations in the State of Vermont.

These efforts have pushed many of the known drug dealers to outlying areas with easy access and short commutes to Chittenden County. The Burlington Police Department has specifically identified several of our recent drug dealing arrivals as having formerly been located and operating out of their city.

Cocaine, both powder and rock (Crack), Marijuana, and diverted prescription drugs including; OxyContin, Valium, Percoset, Vicadin, Morphine, Suboxone and Dilladid are abundantly available in our community and throughout the region. Recent intelligence reveals that we are experiencing the re-introduction of Heroin into our community as well.

Out of state, urban drug dealers are arriving with alarming frequency and the resources (manpower) of the police department are stretched to its limits.

For the past two years there has been a number of unsettling reports of attempted quasi-gang organization efforts in St. Albans.

We see "gang-like" flagging or branding in the form of bandanas, slashes shaved into eyebrows, white shoelaces onto the top of regular shoelaces, tattoos, and incidents in which gang monikers are worn on clothing or painted (tagging) in public locations.

We have independently confirmed that we have individuals who are, or have previously been members of Los Solidos, Latin Kings, Hash Kings, Bloods and the like that are living in our community or frequenting our region. Although the presence of these individuals here has been confirmed at present their activities are not group related or well organized. These incidents do not appear to be interconnected and are sporadic.

In a very large Crack Cocaine investigation in January and February 2007 several males from New York City established a Crack House three doors from the St. Albans Police Department.

We have developed some in-house expertise in the area of gangs through training, and partnering with state and regional gang investigators. We are trying to intervene early and prevent the proliferation of gang-like activity and its establishment here in the community.

We are working hand in hand with our law enforcement partners in the region, no more so than the Vermont State Police who have committed countless man hours and resources to helping us address both the violent crime and criminal drug issues in our city and throughout the county.

This is a collaborative effort and our law enforcement partners are critical to our ability to wrap our arms around this problem.

There is ongoing cooperation between the U.S. Attorneys (Tom Anderson) office and Federal assistance and prosecution in all appropriate criminal matters.

We struggle, as do other law enforcement agencies to fill police vacancies in a very competitive job market. We have increased our street presence (black and whites) and we will increase our criminal highway interdiction efforts.

We will look towards the addition of an alternatively funded, full time drug investigator to deploy with other Drug Task Force members to attack the illicit drug problem in our area. This requires me to plead with you not to allow further erosion of the Byrne Grant Funding that we so desperately need in order for our state to fund the very limited joint investigative resources specifically dedicated to criminal drug enforcement efforts within our state. 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. The Vermont Drug Task Force initiative has a demonstrated and proven success. I fear that further parceling of those funds may undermine the very existence of that program.

We have launched an aggressive Neighborhood Watch initiative that we are utilizing to educate citizens about all types of criminal activities and conduct. Illicit drugs and related criminal activity is discussed at every meeting.

We have held public meetings and forums and created new partnerships and information networks in order to enlist the assistance of all potential partners in our stepped up efforts.

We created a Prescription Drug Take-Back Partnership Program with the Northwest Medical Center that is managed by the St. Albans Police Department. Since June 2008 we have collected more than 15,000 prescription pills.

In June 2008 The St. Albans City Police Department organized and held a "Community Graffiti Clean-Up Day, followed by a community cook out. Fifty two (52) people showed up and participated and helped clean up more than a dozen separate locations.

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.

I am providing the following statistical data to support the analogies and conclusions presented in my testimony.