

Testimony of

The Honorable Martin Manahan

December 5, 2008

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I would like to thank Senator Leahy and the other members of the Senate Judiciary Committee for allowing our community the opportunity to host this hearing on Community- Based solutions to Drug - Related Crime in Rural America.

I have had the honor of serving as Mayor of the City of St. Albans since March, 2006 after serving five years on the City Council. I am one of eight children of John and Teresa Manahan that was born and raised in St. Albans City. I have been married to my wife Lisa for twenty years and we have chosen to raise our 4 children in this community as well. The reason we chose to raise our family in this community is because of the quality of life that it offered my wife and I as children. However, over the last several years that quality of life has been challenged by the crime in our community.

I feel that there are a number of reasons for this increased crime trend not the least of which is prescription drug abuse amongst our youth. We have experienced an alarming trend of property crimes that can be directly associated with illicit drug use within our community. We have taken a number of steps to combat this criminal element within our community.

In 2005 we hired Gary Taylor as our Police Chief following an extensive nationwide search. Since that time we have enhanced our Police Department dramatically. We have created a pay grade system that allows us to hire seasoned officers and pay them commensurate to their experience. We recently negotiated a ten percent base pay increase in the Police Department as well as the ability to offer sign on bonuses which allows us to be much more competitive and attractive to experienced Police Officers

as opposed to a feeder system to larger departments throughout Vermont which has been the case of the past number of years.

We have worked very closely with the Vermont State Police and the Vermont Drug Task Force which has allowed our officers to gain the experience needed to deal with the drug activity that we are now experiencing.

We have recently given the Police Department permission to acquire Tasers, through an equipment exchange, as a form of less than lethal protection. We have been criticized for bringing the fact that St. Albans has the highest crime rate per capita in the State of Vermont to the forefront of discussions within our community. We do not have a monopoly on drug crimes- however we are one of the few communities that are acknowledging the issue and facing it head on. We have held two public forums dealing with the crime within our community over the last year and half, both of which were attended by over 150 community members. I feel that we had a choice... ignore the problem and hoped it disappeared or deal with it head on and make it known that St. Albans City was not going to let this criminal element steal our community from us.

We have had community members step forward and create a very successful Neighbor Hood Watch program throughout the City as well as serve on a Crime Task Force that I appointed to review how we provide public safety as a whole to our community with the goal of providing a more efficient product. We are currently budgeted for 19 Police Officers while analysis of comparable communities suggests we should have a force of 24 Officers.

There are a number of ways to deal with the crime. We as a City Government have the task of dealing with it throughout our Police efforts. It is a difficult balance to provide the Police protection needed for our citizens while at the same time not over burdening them with property taxes. We have been very fiducially responsible in our efforts to accomplish this. So you can imagine how frustrating it is to us while in the mist of dealing with the criminal element we also have to deal with the closure of the Northwest Correctional Facility. We will now be forced to transport individuals that are arrested in our community to Chittenden County or even perhaps Newport or St. Johnsbury. Over the last year we had approximately 150 lodgings as well as 50 detox lodgings. The closing of this jail will now force us to take Officers that are needed on the street away from our community for up to four hours per shift. Which in turn will cause us to call in Officers at a much higher rate of pay. So while we are trying to be sound fiduciary agents for our community we are being delivered a body blow by the State of Vermont by the

changing of this prison to an all women's facility. Now keep in mind the changing of this facility to a women's only facility is not only going to create hardship on our Police Department but is also going to create additional hardship on other social services that are provided within our community.

So, how do I feel we should approach these problems? First and foremost, we need to replace illicit activities with thriving businesses. The best opportunity for increasing investment opportunities in the City is to complete the Federal Street Multimodal Connector. This long envisioned project would serve as a catalyst for downtown revitalization and help attract families, professionals, and employers to this area. We also offer a number of unique opportunities with our proximity to the Canadian border as well as Interstate 89 and our state of the art Tech Center located at the high school. This would also allow our large historical homes to be maintained as single family homes as opposed as being split into apartments.

On another front I feel we should require the pharmaceutical industry that is profiting from this illicit prescription drug use amongst our youth to create a fund that would allow communities such as ours to apply for those funds to help fight as well as rehabilitate the drug offenders.

St. Albans will continue to fight this battle and ultimately be known as the community that faced up to the drug challenge and won because we have members of our community that are not allowing our community to fall prey to this illicit criminal activity. This fight would be much easier with the support that I have indicated previously. Thank you once again for this opportunity to speak before you here today.