

Testimony of
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Chief of Police
Medina Police Department
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SENATE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

"Encouraging Innovative and Cost-Effective Crime Reduction Strategies"

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Good morning Mr. Chairman, committee members. My name is Patrick Berarducci, and I am the Police Chief in Medina, Ohio. I am honored to testify before your committee. In February of this year, I began my 37th year in law enforcement. I began my law enforcement career as a patrolman on the Youngstown, Ohio, Police Department in 1974. I served my country for more than 29 1/2 years as a Special Agent with the United States Justice Department, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives (ATF) and its predecessor, the United States Treasury Department, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms (ATF). Serving as both a Federal law enforcement officer and a local police officer, has given me a unique perspective and shapes my approach as Chief of Police.

I came to my current position in the Medina Police Department in August, 2009, after serving 2 ½ years as Police Chief in Boardman Township, Ohio.

To begin my testimony, for perspective, I will give a brief background of Medina, Ohio. I will then describe seven innovative and cost-saving techniques for improving law enforcement at the local level--TECHNIQUES THAT CAN BE IMPLEMENTED WITHOUT ANY COST TO

CONGRESS--including setting budgets years in advance, taking advantage of social network sites such as Facebook to help police communities, purchasing vehicles in more cost-effective ways, utilizing valuable services provided by non-profits to assist in locating missing children, and teaming up with neighboring communities to provide certain specialized services. These strategies can be utilized in other communities across the country to maintain or increase efficiency while reducing cost. Finally, I will end by offering you a proposal that, I think will help protect the skies at little-to-no cost.

Background of Medina, Ohio

The City of Medina is 12.5 square miles with a population of 26,200 residents and a population density of 2,540 per square mile. Because of a large amount of retail business, schools, and light manufacturing, the city has a service population in excess of 50,000. Officers of the Medina Police Department daily patrol 190 curb lane miles in the city.

Eight years ago, the City of Medina was nearly bankrupt and had to lay off police officers and other city employees. We had our battles with drugs, violence and disorder, but today, thanks to strong local leadership, including then Mayor Jane Leaver, then Police Chief and current Mayor Dennis Hanwell, the city council, the finance director, and the various department heads, a turnaround has occurred. By implementing strategies I will discuss today, we have been able to achieve high standards while reducing costs. Even in the midst of the current recession, which has hit northern Ohio with particular severity, the Medina Police Department is able to show a substantial surplus for the current year.

Medina was recently ranked 40th on the list of "America's best small towns" by Money Magazine. The ranking was no surprise for long-time residents of Medina, who know it as a great place to live, work, and raise a family. Compared to other cities in the survey, the city is ranked high, due to its low crime rate, excellent schools, affordable housing, general low cost of living (ranging 12-20% below the national average), and tremendous local and regional health care system.

The architect of the community policing program in Medina was then Police Chief Dennis Hanwell. During his 13 years as Chief of Police, he instilled the philosophy of community policing and "broken windows" in our department and our community. Chief Hanwell is now Mayor Hanwell, and he is committed to a Community Oriented Government Model in which we will be cross training employees from various departments in aspects of our community policing program.

To quote Dr. George Kelling, "Put simply, broken windows argues that for a community to be safe and prosperous minimal levels of order must be established and maintained." As a community we subscribe to Dr. Kelling's 'broken windows theory' of policing.

Today, the City of Medina offers a wide selection of recreational opportunities and currently has 800 acres developed for park use at 12 different sites. A strong youth sports program utilizes the park fields and the Medina Community Recreation Center through the year.

Regionally, our residents are minutes away from professional sporting events, some of the finest museums in the country, a great theatre district, the world-renown Cleveland Orchestra, and the 3rd most visited national park system in the U.S.

The City of Medina is the county seat for Medina County, one of the fastest growing counties in the State of Ohio. While our location offers an easy drive to Cleveland, Akron, and Columbus, the same highway system reaches 60% of the population of the U.S. in a days drive.

BUDGET AS A CRIME PREVENTION STRATEGY

In my opinion, one of the most important reasons for our success is our five-year budget. Each department in the city has their future appropriations extending forward for five years. I already know what my budget is in 2014 and can plan accordingly. Every decision to hire, purchase, innovate or participate is weighed against its affect on our budget. When cuts need to be made, we know well in advance and can plan for them.

I would suggest our five year budget operates like a "broken windows" program for government by establishing minimal levels of order in our finances and maintaining the stability which the five year budget provides. As a result, our community is stable. I'm convinced it is an important key to our success.

FUGITIVES ON FACEBOOK - MEDINA POLICE USES SOCIAL NETWORKING

We believe that the protection and policing of our city is a shared effort between the police department and the citizens we serve. We looked for innovative ways to engage the community. The answer came from a young patrol officer named Sara Lynn and her suggestion to use Facebook to capture fugitives.

Beginning in late October of 2009, the Medina Police Department began quietly posting the photographs of 109 people wanted on a variety of criminal charges. People with information on the location of the fugitives can tip police off by email, phone or posting a comment on the Facebook page.

In the past, arrest warrants sat in dusty file drawers and resided in the police-only computers. Many times arrests were made only after chance encounters with police or after days of time consuming searching. Now we regularly receive information on fugitives, which saves us time and money.

But, the value of Facebook goes well beyond any arrests that are made. It has enabled us to get instant feedback on our events, our work and issues of concern from the community we serve.

We have fans in 21 countries who speak 11 foreign languages. 61% of our fans are women and 34% of our fans are 35-44 years of age. 25% of our fans are 25-34 and young people between the ages of 13 and 24 represent 13% of our base. As of February 27, 2010, we had over 2,403 fans and the list is growing. So powerful is the influence of this online community that fugitives have come in to surrender, so we don't post their photograph and name on our page.

As I read the comments posted by our fans, I came to realize that we were reaching people at a different level and establishing true two-way communication. Let me read to you some of the comments our fans have posted:

"It's great to know we live in a safe community. Our Police dept;[SIC] is on top of things. This is a great idea posting the warrants. (And I am glad they aren't for more violent crimes.) Our dept does a great job."

"this is the best thing you guys could've done. Mega-kudos to the police dept!!"

"Thanks Medina for keeping us safe!!"

To access the page go to www.facebook.com/medinapolice. Fugitive photographs are displayed on the page and in an album titled, "Warrants." Place your cursor on a photograph and it will display the fugitive's name, the charges and the date the warrant was issued. We also have an album of registered sexual offenders which can be viewed.

We also post links on Facebook for our news releases, upcoming events, and crime prevention tips for the public. This winter we used it to alert the public to severe weather emergency alerts. Facebook has allowed us to have an ongoing dialogue with our community and friends around the world.

A CHILD IS MISSING

A Child Is Missing (ACIM) is a Fort Lauderdale-based non-profit organization founded in 1997, which was created because no community-based program existed for locating missing children, the disabled, and elderly during the crucial first hours of a disappearance. ACIM can place 1,000 telephone calls in sixty seconds and can process multiple cases simultaneously.

On October 6, 2009, we were working a sensitive case involving a missing 11 year old girl who suffers from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. She had gone missing from school after getting in trouble. The girl had been missing for about 4 hours when we were first notified. We were concerned not only that she was missing, but felt she might be in need of medical attention. Our dispatchers called for assistance from other police agencies, our fire department and the Life Support Team (LST) in the search. We called A Child Is Missing, and they activated the Alert Program which resulted in nearly 4,000 alert calls being placed to the area surrounding where the young girl had last been seen. As a result of those alert calls, Medina Police received information that led them to the girl who was found safe.

The assistance is provided to law enforcement at no charge. To duplicate their calling ability would cost a police department thousands of dollars in phone equipment, special software, and staffing expense. For us, all it took was a phone call.

OPERATION TEAMWORK - POLICE SPECIAL TEAMS TO WORK TOGETHER

We have a strong history of working together in Medina County, which is only growing stronger in these difficult financial times. We have a regional view of cooperation that extends well past

the city borders of Medina. We constantly look for ways to more efficiently use the resources we have. One program that has come from this philosophy is operation teamwork with the Medina County Sheriff's Department.

Operation Teamwork is aimed at reducing costs and improving the effectiveness of several components of our operations that are low-frequency but high-liability. Under the program we have combined our SWAT Teams and Jail operations with neighboring communities in an effort to provide more efficient law enforcement operations for the residents of Medina County and the City of Medina. The approach is expected to lower overall operating costs for involved agencies by combining our special enforcement teams and forming a closer working relationship.

The swat team is now a county-wide operation, with our officers joining forces with officers from the Medina County Sheriff's Office, Montville Township Police Department, Medina Township Police Department, and Wadsworth Police Department. Teaming up with our neighbors provides increased staffing of the county-wide SWAT team, which enables a quicker response with the ability to sustain a critical operation for longer periods and provide relief shifts for the officers. Assignment to the team is an extra duty for all the officers. We all save personnel, training, and equipment costs, while gaining the ability to call on the services of the county team. Under the plan, each department is responsible for equipping its own officers.

The other part of operation teamwork involves jail operations. Medina Police Department previously had two temporary detention cells and a jail range. Like the police department building that houses it, the city jail was built over 40 years ago in a different time. Nationwide jail litigation and a variety of adverse court decisions combined to change the standards for operating all jails, making it a much more difficult and costly operation.

In response to these difficulties, the Medina Police Department has again joined forces with the neighboring communities. Medina Police closed its two temporary detention cells and jail range and instead takes all prisoners to the Medina County Jail for processing and detention. Taking our prisoners down the road a mile to the Medina County Jail only makes good sense. In Ohio the sheriff is required to maintain the jail, and our Sheriff, Neil Hassinger, is among the best. The jail is nationally accredited, and its personnel are trained and staffed to deal with the difficult issues that arise in a jail setting. We have now put this asset to work for Medina City.

Teaming up with the County Jail is very beneficial to the city. The operational costs are reduced, because the city pays a fee only when we charge a suspect with a local ordinance; if the suspect is charged with a state violation, we pay no fee. In addition, we will be able to convert our old jail space to other uses, and, because we will not be responsible for overseeing detainees, our officers will be able to return to patrol much more quickly. But the true savings to the city come from the fact that we no longer are exposed to civil liability due to jail operations, and we also will no longer face the associated costs of regulatory enforcement and training of officers in jail operations.

CENTRALIZING DISPATCH SERVICES

Several years ago, then Chief Hanwell realized that Medina City had excess dispatch capacity, but, at the same time, was in need of upgrades to the dispatch equipment. Chief Hanwell turned

to neighboring departments to join forces. The Medina Police Department would provide dispatch services for neighboring departments, while those departments would pay a fee set by contract, for those services. The arrangement would make the needed equipment upgrades affordable, while at the same time promising more efficient services in the future.

Our neighboring departments agreed to the arrangement, and the dispatch center has been operational since 2004. The Medina Police Department provides dispatch services for the Medina Township Police Department, the Montville Police Department, and the Medina Township Fire Department. The dispatch center also provides dispatch services for all emergency medical calls, through an agreement, with the Medina Life Support Team, which is run by Medina Hospital. The group continues to share in the costs of operating such a center and meets regularly to discuss any issues that arise.

Overall, the partnership has proven to be a substantial cost savings to all parties, while providing the residents quality, efficient service. The program has also led to additional savings by combining training for employees from all three jurisdictions.

CARS FOR COPS

When I was the Police Chief in Boardman, Ohio, I saw an opportunity to save money for the department as well as help local businesses during very difficult financial times.

Instead of purchasing new, expensive police cars for detectives and department administrators, we purchased used cars from local dealers. We reasoned that detectives and administrators did not put the same hard miles on a vehicle that basic patrol does, so there was no need for heavy-duty radiators, transmissions, and suspensions.

We were able to purchase these cars from local dealers at or below the wholesale price, which in most cases was less than half the original cost of the new vehicle. We set our criteria for purchase at a vehicle one-year old and no more than 20,000 miles. Vehicles purchased in this manner should give five to six years of dependable service before needing to be replaced.

We saved substantial money, helped our local businesses, and gave our detectives vehicles that truly matched our community. Our goal was to make suspects wonder if every car they passed on the highway was a detective.

A SUGGESTION - POLICING THE SKIES

Finally, I'd like to present you with my final suggestion for a cost-saving and innovative program to make our air travel much safer. Unfortunately as a Police Chief, I do not have the authority to enact this suggestion, but you can.

This nation has well over 400,000 trained and certified police officers regulated by their individual states. Those officers qualify with their firearms every year and walk armed among

our communities everyday to protect us. They are armed off duty as well as on duty. They go armed to our houses of worship, our schools, our businesses, and our hospitals, always prepared to confront an assailant and to protect innocent lives.

These officers are not paid when off duty and armed, but they take on the added responsibility because of a sense of duty.

These same officers are required to disarm on every off duty trip they take on commercial aircraft, and their firearms are stored in the baggage hold if taken at all. Over 400,000 trained officers are routinely disarmed by antiquated policies while you are beseeched for more money to make our skies safer.

There is already a procedure for armed Federal Agents and Police Officers on duty to register with the ticket agent before each flight. There is already a procedure to notify the gate, the crew, and the captain of each flight of the fact you are armed and what seat you are in. You are not permitted to have alcohol nor are you offered any while armed. In the rare case, a Federal Air Marshal is also on the flight, there is already a procedure to make sure they know you and you know them. The Federal Government has a training program for officers and agents to teach them best practices of "Flying Armed." I know this because I did it for almost 30 years and hundreds of flights.

This nation's law enforcement officers represent a tremendous ongoing investment made by every individual community, state, and the Federal Government. We train, regulate, and equip our nationwide population of law enforcement. They represent hundreds of thousands of years of collective experience. Use them wisely and effectively.

If congress is looking for cost-effective ways to increase public safety, then it doesn't get much easier--or much cheaper--than this. The Federal Government can get a substantial free-rider effect from the years of training provided by state and local law enforcement. I accordingly recommend that all qualified law enforcement officers be permitted to fly armed regardless of duty status.

Mr. Chairman and committee members, I appreciate the opportunity to testify here today, and I am available to answer questions. Thank you.