



LYCOMING COUNTY
OFFICE OF DISTRICT ATTORNEY
LYCOMING COUNTY COURTHOUSE
48 WEST THIRD STREET • WILLIAMSPORT, PA 17701
TELEPHONE: (570) 327-2456 • FAX: (570) 327-2324

ERIC R. LINHARDT
DISTRICT ATTORNEY
KENNETH A. OSOKOW
FIRST ASSISTANT DISTRICT ATTORNEY

TROY D. SELLERS
ADULT VICTIM WITNESS COORDINATOR
LAURA L. BOWER
JUVENILE VICTIM WITNESS COORDINATOR

CENTER FOR RURAL PENNSYLVANIA PUBLIC HEARING: THE OPIOID EPIDEMIC

PREPARED REMARKS OF LYCOMING COUNTY DISTRICT ATTORNEY ERIC R.
LINHARDT

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Drug overdose deaths and opioid-involved deaths continue to increase in the United States. The majority of drug overdose deaths (more than six out of ten) involve an opioid. Since 1999, the number of overdose deaths involving opioids (including prescription opioids and heroin) quadrupled. From 2000 to 2015, more than half a million people died from drug overdoses. Ninety one Americans die every day from an opioid overdose, and Pennsylvania is among the states hardest hit. Between 2014 and 2015, the drug overdose rate in Pennsylvania increased by 21%.

As we all know, education, prevention, treatment, prescription drug monitoring, and proper disposal of unwanted medication are all essential aspects of a successful effort to combat and confront the heroin crises. To the extent that each you as legislators have assisted in these efforts, I thank you.

Unfortunately, what I believe has been painfully absent from the public discussion, is the fact that any successful effort to combat and confront the heroin crises, must also include adequate funding for our law enforcement officers, and municipal drug task forces, as well as tougher sentences for drug crimes and trafficking involving heroin. Eighty percent of all crimes that I am asked to deal with are drug related. Yet in a County of over 100,000 people, I have only 14 officers assigned as full time narcotic officers, and five of those officers are with the Pennsylvania State Police Vice and Narcotics Unit that is responsible for a nine county area. I could use three times that number of officers.

Furthermore, under our current sentencing guidelines, a heroin dealer who does not have a significant criminal history, faces only 3-12 months in County Work Release; a sentence that