

# PENN TOWNSHIP POLICE DEPARTMENT

20 Wayne Avenue ♦ Hanover PA 17331

Phone: 717-637-8751

Fax: 717-637-3546

Email: [info@pennpolice.com](mailto:info@pennpolice.com)

James W. Laughlin, Chief of Police



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Center for Rural Pennsylvania

Good morning,

I am Chief Jim Laughlin of the Penn Township Police Department, Hanover Pa. I currently have 33 years of law enforcement experience with our department. I spent 25 years of my career on the street as a patrolman and Patrol Sergeant.

Throughout my career I have witnessed and experienced a little bit of everything. I come before you today to discuss and hopefully provide some insight from the officers who are on the front lines of this heroin epidemic occurring in York County. I will also provide you with some suggestions or recommendations for the issues I'm about to discuss.

During my career there have always been drugs and this problem will be here long after I retire. The current trend of heroin use is like nothing we have witnessed before. I have personally witnessed its devastation on the community and what it has done to families. Currently, our department's Thefts, Retail Thefts, robberies and burglaries are driven by a subject's addiction to this opiate. I have seen families torn apart and viewed many deaths of young people stopped early in their lives.

The Good Samaritan Act which took effect late last year was a huge step for law enforcement in our efforts to save lives by administering the antidote, NARCAN. Penn Township and the surrounding Hanover area is fortunate to have a paid ambulance service which responds immediately. Our officers usually have ems personnel on the scene in a relatively short time, but many rural departments must wait for their arrival. By the York County DA's office stepping forward and initiating their distribution program, departments throughout York County have the availability of this life saving antidote. Currently our department has 3 saves with the use of NARCAN.

This bring me to the point of interest why I come before you. A successful save by NARCAN starts an unpredictable experience. Every individual reacts in a different manner and few if any are happy or thrilled to open their eyes and see police officers or ems personnel standing over them. Officers experience hostility, confusion and outright aggression towards them. The average citizen believes a subject wakes up then thanks everyone which is far from reality. The availability of NARCAN has already created a sense of security. Individuals now know that if their family or friends legally obtain the antidote they will be "saved" if they overdose. The law provides immunity from prosecution if police or ems are called to the scene to provide this life saving procedure.

Please don't misunderstand what I am about to say, because saving the individual's life is top priority. Where is the responsibility for ones actions? This individual is fighting an addiction and they know it. This addiction is

running their lives and many would like to get away from the hold this drug has on them. Many individuals want help. Many families or loved ones would like the individual to get help but cannot force them to seek assistance. Many times these same loved ones have asked our officers where to seek help and I personally have had families beg me to arrest their son or daughter so they will get help through the courts.

Under the current new Act, when an officer responds to a scene and administers NARCAN, any evidence collected is then destroyed which is directly against all the training we have received. The subject and caller are immune from prosecution. Again, I ask, where is the responsibility for ones actions? The state is asking an officer to assist the subject, then destroy the evidence and walk away. As always, this is taken on a case by case basis and there are a many factors that could influence a department's actions.

I believe this is where the state can step in and help these individuals and also provide assistance to family members.

I have a recommendation: Individuals that have been saved by NARCAN and overdosed on an opiate should not receive an unconditional free pass. The subject should be charged but have an option. What if the court system had a program similar to ARD consisting of mandatory classes or counseling. This would possibly provide the individual with the help they have been avoiding. For families, it would be a sense of comfort knowing the individual is receiving some help. What if the individual is given supervised probation for a designated period of time? If the subject completes an established program then the charges would be withdrawn. If the subject fails to complete the program then the charges stand and become part of their criminal record.

Whether an individual is charged or not, if they overdose there should be some form of mandatory counseling they must complete or be financially responsible to the county for the NARCAN. If there is no consequence for their actions, the state is enabling the addiction and providing a false sense of security.

I fully understand that this idea is not going to stop the use of drugs. My thoughts and recommendation are being offered to you in hope that you understand this problem is real and part of our community. We will continue to do all we can to save lives but I feel there could be more to this law. It stops short and is missing a great opportunity to provide assistance to these individuals. Anyone who is able to overcome this addiction is a success story and deserves the opportunity to rebuild their lives and be a valuable member of society.

Thank you for allowing me to speak before this committee.

Have a great day.

Chief James Laughlin  
Penn Township Police Department  
Hanover, PA. 17331  
717-637-8751