



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON

# Finance

SENATOR CHUCK GRASSLEY, OF IOWA - CHAIRMAN

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Opening Statement of Sen. Chuck Grassley  
Hearing, "The Social and Economic Effects of the Methamphetamine Epidemic on America's  
Child Welfare System"  
Tuesday, April 25, 2006

Today's meeting of the Senate Finance Committee is for the purpose of hearing testimony on "The Social and Economic Effects of the Methamphetamine Epidemic on America's Child Welfare System." It is worth noting that this is the first hearing the full Finance Committee has had on an issue relating to child welfare in nearly 10 years.

Discussions of issues relative to child welfare are long overdue and if time permits, I intend to hold another full committee hearing on child welfare issues, particularly as they relate to the "Promoting Safe and Stable Families" program which the Congress must reauthorize this year. Today we will hear about the awful toll that methamphetamine abuse and addiction are taking on families, communities and our nation's social services infrastructure, particularly as it relates to children.

Methamphetamine is possibly the fastest-growing drug threat in America. According to a survey from the National Association of Counties, 58 percent of counties report that meth is their largest drug problem. Meth is highly addictive and the effects last longer than crack or cocaine. Meth is relatively easy to make and cheap, compared to other drugs. According to the 2003 National Survey on Drug Use and Health, more than 12 million Americans have tried meth. Meth-making operations have been uncovered in all 50 states, but the most wide-spread abuse has been concentrated in the western, southwestern and midwestern United States.

Numerous reports indicate that methamphetamine abuse is on the increase, particularly among women of child-bearing age. This is having an impact on child welfare systems in many states. According to a survey administered by the National Association of Counties, "The Impact of Meth on Children," meth is major cause of child abuse and neglect. Forty percent of all the child welfare officials in the survey report increased out-of-home placements because of meth in the last year.

Many child welfare agencies are struggling to cope with the unique challenges associated with parental addiction to meth. Children living with a meth-addicted parent are often exposed to toxic chemicals such as ammonia, iodine, hydrochloric acid, starter fluid and drain cleaner used during the production of the drug. Because the parent's high lasts for hours and drug binges can persist for days, children are often left neglected to fend for themselves.

Additionally, one of the effects of meth is a dramatic increase in a user's sex drive. As a result, children are often exposed to pornography and sexual abuse.

While this hearing today will highlight the strains that the meth epidemic is perpetuating on the child welfare system, it is important to note that our nation's child welfare system is already overburdened. The system is understaffed and under-trained. Children linger too long before securing a safe and permanent home.

More funding could be available for adoption assistance and family reunification services. Administrative funds could be used more efficiently. Data collection is insufficient. Finally the child welfare financing structure is antiquated and inflexible and prevents states from responding to a variety of challenges.

I am hopeful that working on a bipartisan basis, the Senate Finance Committee can address fundamental flaws in our current child welfare system that impede progress to ensure every child's well-being.