

Written Testimony of Lieutenant Daniel L. Springer
Commander – Missouri River Drug Task Force
Gallatin County Sheriff's Office

Before the Senate Committee on Finance
Hearing on "Breaking the Methamphetamine Supply Chain:
Law Enforcement Challenges"
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Good morning Mr. Chairman, Senator Baucus, and members of the Committee. It is my great pleasure to be here today.

In 1992 the Missouri River Drug Task Force (MRDTF) was established in Montana as a regionally-proactive enforcement response designed to aggressively combat the increasing effects of dangerous drug use and distribution occurring within seven specific jurisdictions of concern. The Missouri River Drug Task Force has nine full-time investigators and covers an area of 17,000 square miles. Massachusetts and Connecticut combined, does not equal the size of our jurisdiction.

Financial allocations received from the "Byrne Memorial Grant" served as the fiscal catalyst behind the jurisdictional alignment. Operating beneath this collaborative investigative premise, MRDTF investigations, in conjunction with State and Local authorities, DEA, ICE, ATF, IRS and the National Park Service have been instrumental in the identification, disruption, and dismantling of Drug Trafficking Organizations (DTO) engaged in the distribution of dangerous drugs within Montana, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, California, and Utah.

Narcotic Officers across the country are facing multiple challenges regarding methamphetamine. The largest challenge is the fight itself. We are working with decreased funding, limited resources, a growing epidemic and vicious drug related crimes. Forty-two percent of Law Enforcement agencies recognize methamphetamine as the number one drug concern within their jurisdiction. There is no close second.

When I started as a patrol deputy ten years ago it was extremely rare to find even personal-use methamphetamine on the street. Today, it is not only common--it is the norm--and often in larger quantities than personal use. Methamphetamine hit our area like a freight train and we have seen nothing but a steady increase in the supply and the demand over the past ten years. If your area has not been hit by this epidemic, be very thankful; but prepare yourselves for something that you have never seen before.

The MRDTF has seen a consistent rise in drug activity throughout our jurisdiction over the past ten years. With this increase in drug activity, there has been an increase in crime. However, the primary funding source of the MRDTF, the Byrne Memorial Grant, has decreased by 62 % over the past five years.

Due to significant cuts in federal funding, the number of investigators needed to combat this epidemic has stagnated to a point where we are just maintaining rather than conducting pro-active, hard-hitting investigations.

The advantage of the Byrne Memorial Grant has been the ability to use the money in multiple ways. The Byrne Grants allow us to use the money for salaries, overtime, vehicles, drug “buy” money, informant payments, support staff salaries and many other areas. I would ask for a consistent and stable form of funding that does not keep agencies hanging in the balance from year to year. A funding source of this nature would allow for extended planning and extended expectations.

The Montana State Legislature has recently passed pre-cursor laws limiting access to items used in the making of methamphetamine. These laws have apparently been highly successful and we have seen a dramatic decrease in the number of “mom and pop” methamphetamine labs. However, we have seen a dramatic increase in the importation of methamphetamine. The methamphetamine imported to Montana is primarily coming from Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Utah and eventually Mexico. The Super Labs of Mexico are supplying the majority of the methamphetamine within the United States and the factories used to make pseudoephedrine are shipping it to Mexico in mass quantities.

Directly linking methamphetamine to other crimes is not easy to do. Very few defendants admit to committing the crime, let alone admit to committing that crime while using meth or in an attempt to purchase meth. One thing we do know is that methamphetamine is no longer the “cheap” drug used by those who can’t afford other drugs. In our area, the price of methamphetamine is currently twice the price of cocaine. With the increase in price, and the addictive nature of this drug, the pursuit of methamphetamine has increasingly become a criminal motive for violent and weapons-related criminal acts. The increasing frequency of burglaries, thefts, robberies, and assaults each serve to reflect the devastating social effects of methamphetamine on our local communities.

Through my very small window of the world, I see individuals getting killed over drugs. I see people losing family members to drugs; I see families and friends being torn apart due to drugs; and I see the productive citizens of our communities becoming victims of crimes due to drugs. I see the enormous toll that methamphetamine takes on an individual both mentally and physically in a very short period of time.

Money alone cannot solve the methamphetamine issue in Montana. However, without a sustainable source of financial support, the success and momentum of these historically complex and effective efforts will inevitably falter.

Local enforcement efforts are arguably the first and last line of defense in the war on methamphetamine. And while our communities cannot afford to lose the battle, the MRDTF cannot afford to wage the war alone.