

House Majority Policy Committee hearing on, *"It Stops Here: Taking Action to Protect Pennsylvania from Increasing Crime."*

Written testimony

Good morning Mr. Chairman, and members of the House Majority Policy Committee. My testimony today will be on the state of crime and its roots in Bucks County and what steps we can all take to prevent future crime.

As you all know, many people suffer from drug and alcohol substance use disorders. Others suffer from poor mental health. And a majority of those two subsets suffer from both. It is fair to say that about 75% of all crime in Bucks County is drug/alcohol related or fueled. And many of the people committing these crimes do so either because they are under the influence at the time, or to fuel their addictions, or because of the inherently dangerous situations that addiction naturally leads to. Many of these same people who are addicted to drugs or alcohol are "self medicating" to compensate for some poor mental health issue.

This is not to excuse anyone's criminal behavior. I do believe fiercely in self-determinism, and in self-accountability for one's actions. But I also believe that if we can attack the root of "why people commit crimes," then we can break that vicious cycle of drug/alcohol addiction, or poor mental health, and crime.

Along these lines, we in the Bucks County criminal justice system have done what we can to create specialty courts for drug and mental health treatment as early as possible for people who are addicted, or suffer from poor mental health, once they get arrested for committing a crime. By diverting them early into the treatment they need, while still holding them accountable for their crimes, we hope to protect society from future recidivism, and to make them productive members of society once they pay the debt they owe.

One glaring hole in our current system, is where to put these people once they are identified. Many are suffering from withdrawal, or decompensating, or from acute mental health episodes. There are simply not enough beds to house them while we are trying to triage their cases to determine where they should best be served, and simultaneously maintaining public protection. Often times, they end up jail. This is a poor fit for many nonviolent offenders, but there are few alternatives.

Recently, many Bucks County stakeholders have banded together to create and house a crisis stabilization unit here. Bucks County government has pledged \$5,000,000, and Doylestown Health has pledged the land on which to build this facility for \$1. We need more funds. We are in the process of trying to procure this funding from the state, through grants and legislative action.

Another issue that I see is the creep of crime from Philadelphia. The criminal legal philosophies in Bucks County and in Philadelphia are different. Here, as Bucks County District Attorney, I believe in law and order. In enforcement of the laws, keeping people safe, but with compassion. People have a right to not only be safe, but to feel safe.

One specific issue we are seeing spread from neighboring counties, particularly Philadelphia, is the commission of more gun crimes, and straw purchases of firearms on behalf of criminals who are prohibited from possessing guns, and who then use them to commit more crimes. We have gone to great lengths to partner with local, county, state and federal law enforcement agencies to robustly enforce existing firearms crimes, with recent great success. I pledge to continue these robust enforcement efforts with your help. Each successful prosecution in this arena helps to distinguish us from Philadelphia, and sends a strong message of deterrence to criminal offenders: do not commit crimes with guns in Bucks County, because you will be arrested, prosecuted, and punished.

Respectfully Submitted

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