



# GREENE COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

Department of Law and Order for Greene County, Pennsylvania

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BRIAN TENNANT  
Sheriff

To the Members of the State Government Committee,

May 2, 2017

Pennsylvania has a drug problem of catastrophic proportions that continues to rise and worsen every single day. What Pennsylvania needs is a multifaceted approach that includes prevention, law enforcement interdiction, our courts, and rehabilitation. While not the only answer to the problem, law enforcement does play a very important role. Police agencies across the state are understaffed, underfunded, and overworked. Simply put, this drug problem is bigger than any one law enforcement agency or approach can manage.

In many areas of our state the drug epidemic continues to spiral out of control, unchecked, while dealers freely deal drugs and users on the street stick needles into their arms without so much as looking over their shoulders, because of the lack of law enforcement presence. This is not because law enforcement does not care, but because they are not well-funded enough or adequately staffed to deal with such a monumental problem.

There is no single resolution to this problem, but the Sheriffs of Pennsylvania can and should be able to participate in this battle. What most Pennsylvanians do not know or realize is that in a 2006 Pennsylvania Supreme Court decision, Kopko vs. Miller, the Sheriffs of Pennsylvania were stripped of their ability to investigate crimes, including drug-related offenses. The magnitude of the drug problem in Pennsylvania cannot be overstated. As an example, In August of 2015, Washington County, Pennsylvania, a county of around 200,000, experienced 25 over-doses in a 2 day period, 16 of those coming in 24 of those hours and 8 over-doses occurred within a 69 minute window, a staggering statistic. In order to help with this problem, Sheriffs need the ability to investigate.

While this battle rages on, drugs continue to get the upper hand, addiction rates rise, and our sons and daughters continue to die in the streets. All the while, there stands an army of 67 Sheriffs and more than 2500 deputies who are directly accountable to the communities they serve across this state. They are equipped, ready, willing, and trained to aid in the effort to help take back their communities from drugs. But because of current case law and of the lack of current legislation, we are shackled, standing on the sidelines unable to do anything but watch drugs continue to destroy our communities.

I do not want to be a police force who is answering calls for service, handling accidents, and the like. But I desperately want to help with our biggest problem, the drug epidemic. Currently, I have the ability and desire but need the authority to do so. This would be monumental, particularly in more rural areas where law enforcement is already spread thin, like Greene County.

What would it take to mobilize this great asset into the battle in this desperate time of need? Not much, a simple act of legislation: House Bill 466. As previously stated Sheriffs and their Deputies are already in place, trained, and equipped. Passing this legislation would not cost tax-payers a dime and you could put over 2500 trained and capable people on the streets to help combat this problem.

In Pennsylvania, in 2014, 2,742 people died from overdoses, an average of over 7 per day. In 2015, 3,383\* died as a result of overdose, an average of over 9 per day, an increase of over 23% in 1 year. The time for action is now. It is time to allow the Sheriffs and Deputies of Pennsylvania to take action and to do the jobs that we swore an oath to do. Please vote in favor of House Bill 466, our future depends on it.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. A. Tennant".

Greene County Sheriff Brian A. Tennant

\* [https://www.dea.gov/divisions/phi/2016/phi071216\\_attach.pdf](https://www.dea.gov/divisions/phi/2016/phi071216_attach.pdf)