

City of Lancaster

Testimony of Charles W. Smithgall, Mayor

August 29, 2000

My name is Charlie Smithgall, and I am the Mayor of the City of Lancaster. More importantly, I am a lifelong resident of the city, a businessman, and a concerned parent and citizen.

Lancaster is an All-America city. We have a lot to be proud and thankful for. But we also are very concerned. The drugs and violence that are becoming prevalent in our city cause us to wonder about our future. I know that residents of many similar cities across this Commonwealth and the Country have the same concerns.

Smaller cities, like Lancaster, Reading, and Harrisburg have become havens for drug dealers. As the larger cities like New York and Philadelphia get extra resources to drive them away, they look for places to go to continue their illicit trade and expand their market.

This illegal and despicable activity lowers the Quality of Life in our city. Residents have to put up with crackheads for neighbors, and both serious and petty crime makes our good citizens frustrated and disgusted. They fear walking the streets, lest they be caught in a gun battle, which happened to a young mother just a few months ago. They are reluctant to become involved in the criminal justice system fearing retaliation. But most of all, they regret that the safety and comfort they enjoyed for years in this fine city is threatened by the drug trade.

And their fears are not groundless. Yes, our city is relatively safe, but it is not safe enough. Drug skirmishes abound, with too many gun battles and shots fired as drug dealers fight for turf. Although these shootings are not random acts, they instill fear in both our citizens and those who would otherwise visit our city.

This violence takes a heavy economic toll on our city, as tourism and downtown business suffer from media headlines about these shootings in the city.

Such violence also puts a strain on police, emergency responders, and other services, such as city hospitals, which must dedicate many resources to patching up victims of drug related gunshots, many of whom are drug dealers themselves, mostly at the hospital's expense.



Office of Mayor
Charles W. Smithgall

As Mayor, I'm determined to deal with the drug and quality of life issues this city faces.

Currently, we have a professional, dedicated Drug Suppression Unit that aggressively pursues and arrests street level dealers, and they work in tandem with the district Attorney's countywide drug task force.

Last year, the city created 25 additional positions, Neighborhood Police Officers, to help community members identify and solve problems to improve their neighborhoods.

However, we are not going to be effective in these endeavors if we can't separate drug dealers from their guns. We need help with drug spawned violence.

In this city, most of the violence involving firearms is directly related to drug trade. If we can keep illegal firearms from being readily accessible from drug dealers, we will cut our violent crime rate dramatically.

This is a critical step to making our city safer

Providing stronger laws and penalties is one piece of puzzle. It may act as a deterrent in some cases. And in all cases the offending party will be removed from the community for a longer period of time, which will help provide peace to a neighborhood.

I urge you to pass House Bill #2165