

PA House Judiciary Hearing – Community Corrections

Thursday, January 25, 2018

Reading Regional Airport

Deputy Chief James Marasco

Reading City Police Department

Good morning, I am Deputy Chief James Marasco of the Reading City Police Department. I am here on behalf of Chief Andres Dominguez.

The City of Reading is comprised of 10.13 square miles, located in central Berks County. Reading has a population of 87,500 people, in reality, its closer to 100,000 people when you take into account the transient and undocumented population. Reading has a median income of about 27,000.00. That's about 30,000.00 less than the Pennsylvania State median income of 57,000.00. Approximately 70 percent of Reading's population is Hispanic, 20 percent white, and 10 percent black.

Reading city has been in Act 47 for the past ten years and is expected to come out of Act 47 in 2019. Due to proper management, Reading is improving, and those improvements are only expected to continue.

The Reading City Police Department is comprised of 168 men and women, the majority of whom work in operations. Patrol, Criminal Investigation, and drug investigation, or VICE. The Reading City VICE Unit has, and continues to work and share information with our Federal, State, and County partners. All of those relationships have proven to be successful for both Reading and the surrounding area.

A review of our Part I offenses, which are considered the serious crimes, as a measurement of crime activity, will note that for three consecutive years the total Part I Crimes, which include homicide, robberies, burglaries, and thefts have all decreased for all three consecutive years since 2015.

None-the-less, Reading continues to deal with a significant and systemic drug problem. This is in part due to our location, between New York and Florida along the Interstate 95 corridor. The majority of the drugs Reading deals with are Marijuana, K-2, or Synthetic Marijuana, Powder Cocaine, Crack Cocaine, Methamphetamine, Heroin and Fentanyl, and Prescription Medications.

Over the past two years, the Reading City VICE Unit has served 245 search warrants, made 194 felony arrests, 137 misdemeanor arrests, conducted 179 self-initiated investigations, we currently are involved in ten federal investigations. We've recovered 79 guns, specifically tied to drug investigations. We've seized more than three million dollars in assets, and countless pounds and kilos of just about every kind of drug. And those numbers only apply to our VICE Unit, they do not include what the patrol unit members have done on their end.

Reading is an urban environment, and is the county seat. Among those services are Probation and parole, the court system, Children and Youth services, mental health services. Reading is also where people come to file for state benefits such as unemployment and food stamps. It's where people come for help with issues such as immigration and a host of other legal issues. Reading has public transportation, hospitals, and drug and alcohol treatment facilities.

That being said, it only makes sense that places such as ADAPPT would choose to locate themselves here. It's where the people they serve are better able to get the help and access the services they need. The City of Reading and the Reading City Police Department want to be good neighbors with places such as ADAPPT. And we will do our part to help ensure the safety of those individuals, and we will do our part to help facilitate the success of the individuals who reside there.

We would ask however, that ADAPPT and the Pennsylvania Department of Community Corrections do their part to ensure the health and safety of those in their care. Many incarcerated individuals who become residents of ADAPPT may come to the facility with untreated substance use disorders. As they re-enter the community, the risk of drug use/addiction increases exponentially without access to drug treatment. We ask that they make sure the individuals they serve have access to the addiction services they require. We ask that they secure their facility in such a way that it prevents individuals from getting drugs into the facility. And we ask that they hire a competent and professional staff who foster a safe and rehabilitative environment.

The Reading City Police Department will continue to do its part to make Reading a safer and more welcoming city for all who come here. We appreciate the opportunity to address this committee and we look forward to working with anyone who shares these goals.