

Testimony of Chief Kevin Hearod, McAlester Police Department before the Subcommittee on Government Operations and Border Management of the Senate Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

Examining the Effects of Increased Migration on Communities Along the Southern Border, April 26, 2023

On March 16, 2023, the McAlester Police Department was preparing for a funeral to pay our respects and honors to a former Chief of Police, Dale Nave. He was the chief for nearly 20 years and hired a large percentage of the officers that work at the McAlester Police Department today. Before the funeral that morning Shift Commander Captain Richard Parker failed to report for duty and was found in his house deceased. After several hours at Richard's house, I sent several officers to escort Captain Parker to the medical examiner's office in Tulsa. On March 17 I sent 5 officers to escort Parker from the medical examiner's office to a funeral home in Wetumka. Our officers were met by officers from several agencies that joined in the escort. The procession was traveling South on U.S. 75 through the city of Glenpool when Martin Rivas Rodriguez lost control of his vehicle as he was traveling North on 75 and jumped the guard rail and collided with Joseph Barlow's patrol unit. The collision hit with great force and destroyed the front of Joseph's police car. All of my officers tried to get Joseph out of the car, but the damage was too extensive. Joseph was eventually cut out and transported by ambulance to St. John's Hospital in Tulsa. Martin Rodrigues was arrested for driving without a license and it was discovered that he was an undocumented immigrant. Joseph passed away from the injuries sustained in the wreck on March 20th. Joseph was kept on life support machines for 2 more days because he was an organ donor. On March 22nd 5 of Joseph's organs were harvested including his heart, liver and one of his lungs. These organs went to 5 people. This tragedy was a great loss to our department and to our community. Joseph was an Army veteran and had worked for the police department for less than 2 years. Joseph left behind a wife and 1 year old son.

In my career I have worked patrol shifts, investigation divisions and narcotics units. Drugs are obviously the greatest threat to my community. 23years ago, while assigned to a narcotics unit I was sent to Quantico Virginia to get certified to be able to disassemble clandestine labs safely. At that time methamphetamine was the main drug of choice in Oklahoma. People were buying and stealing pseudoephedrine and converting it to methamphetamine. About 20 years ago Oklahoma made it illegal to purchase pseudoephedrine over the counter. It could only be purchased from a pharmacy and the purchaser had to show identification. This led to the end of clan labs in our area, and it has been many years since the last working lab was discovered in Pittsburg County.

My agency works closely with the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA) and the Oklahoma Bureau of Narcotics and Dangerous Drugs (OBN). These agencies have informed me that the narcotics that are present in our communities come from Mexico. Methamphetamine is still the most prevalent drug, but Fentanyl is becoming more widely used. OBN seized 830.7 pounds of Methamphetamine and 2.01 pounds of Fentanyl in 2020. Last year that number jumped to 3,549.39 pounds of meth and 122.72 pounds of Fentanyl. This places a great strain on law enforcement and the community. As the number of drugs available increase unfortunately the number of accidental overdoses also increase. In 2019 Oklahoma recorded 883 overdose deaths and in 2021 the number climbed to 1005. My department has had to supply every officer for the

past 5 years with Narcan. Fortunately, many of my officers have been able to administer Narcan on several accidental overdoses and prevent many people from dying. When there are more illegal drugs in the community there is an increase in other crimes, especially property crimes.

In my career I have met thousands of people in need of assistance from law enforcement. Many of these have been the victims of crimes and some were just stuck in a bad situation and needed help. Many of these people have been undocumented immigrants. This part of our community is particularly vulnerable. In my dealings with this community, I have become aware of several reasons for this vulnerability including language barriers and a lack of trust in the police department, as well as others taking advantage of them being reluctant to involve the police in their matters. I have personally met many victims that were hesitant to talk with a police officer and I assume there are many in McAlester that have been victimized and have not reported the crime.