

STATEMENT  
OF  
ERIC J. SEVERSON  
WAUKESHA COUNTY SHERIFF  
WAUKESHA, WISCONSIN

BEFORE THE

UNITED STATES SENATE  
COMMITTEE ON HOMELAND SECURITY  
AND GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

THE EFFECTS OF BORDER INSECURITY AND LAX IMMIGRATION ENFORCEMENT ON  
AMERICAN COMMUNITIES

MARCH 1, 2017

## Statement of

Eric J. Severson  
Sheriff,  
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Before the U.S. Senate Committee  
on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs

### **“The Effects of Border Insecurity and Lax Immigration Enforcement on American Communities”**

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#### **Introduction**

Chairman Johnson, Ranking Member McCaskill, and distinguished members of the Committee. It is my honor to address you today on behalf of the Citizens of Waukesha County and the State of Wisconsin.

My name is Eric Severson and I am the Sheriff of Waukesha County. Waukesha County is a mix of rural and suburban communities located West of and adjacent to Milwaukee County. I have served my community as a law enforcement officer for over 32 years.<sup>1</sup>

To provide context for my testimony today, I have included a brief biography. I would highlight that I currently serve on the Board of Directors of the National Sheriff’s Association. I am also a member and past Chairman of the Board of Directors of the Wisconsin HIDTA.

#### **The Drug Threat**

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<sup>1</sup> Prior to my service in the Sheriff Office, I served just under two years as a municipal police officer in rural Grant County, Wisconsin. I have familiarity with both large and small agencies as well as familiarity with communities that have varying population densities.

The greatest impact on the safety of our community as it relates to “Border Insecurity,” is the ease of bringing controlled substances into our community by way of the Mexican American Boarder.

The lions share of the controlled substances consumed in SE Wisconsin is sourced from south of the boarder.<sup>2</sup> Heroin and Opiate pharmaceuticals have been the chief drug threat in Wisconsin. Heroin consumed in my community was transported through the southern boarder, in its entirety. Today, Mexican drug cartels are growing Poppy plants, to manufacture locally produced heroin, making Mexico a source country for heroin.<sup>3</sup>

Methamphetamine is an emerging drug threat.<sup>4</sup> 95 percent of methamphetamine in Wisconsin comes from Mexico.

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<sup>2</sup> The Poppy plant needed to produce opium which is refined into heroin, is not produced at all, in the United States. Heroin consumed in my community was all trafficked through the southern boarder. In fact, Mexican drug cartels are growing Poppy plants, to manufacture locally produced heroin, making Mexico a source country for heroin.

<sup>3</sup> High grade marijuana, and edible marijuana products continue to be available. West coast suppliers are a significant source for the south east Wisconsin market. Much of this drug supply is also sourced from south of the border.

Cocaine availability is now again on the rise. We are seeing very high availability and low prices. Again Nearly all Cocaine consumed in the united states is sourced from south of the U.S. Mexican Border.

<sup>4</sup> In Wisconsin we have taken the legislative steps to limit the availability of the precursor Pseudoephedrine to the extent that we have virtually eliminated local production of home-made methamphetamine.

## **Life and Health Safety**

The drug public health crisis is not limited to boarder communities or major cities alone. In the last 10 years my county has lost 387 of our citizens due to controlled substance overdose deaths. Last year alone we experienced over 35 drug related deaths. One third of that total involved heroin. Fentanyl, an adulterant often added to heroin, has increased the lethality of heroin.<sup>5</sup> We now see Fentanyl as yet another illicit drug entering the U.S. through the southern boarder.<sup>6</sup>

On a local level we are doing all we can to protect my citizens. Last year my deputies administered Narcan 21 times saving 17 lives.

## **Crime and Violence Relating to Drug Importation Trade**

Along with the drug trafficking business comes violence. Robberies, home invasions, burglaries, and thefts are all the byproduct of drug users seeking the resources to fuel their addiction.<sup>7</sup>

Our community's drug enforcement officers must face the dangerous realities of the drug trade. One example of this is the growing use of mobile drug house crews. These dealers sell heroin from stolen vehicles (often car-jacked) and will evade apprehension by recklessly eluding police by ramming squads and even citizen-owned vehicles in their efforts to escape apprehension. These dangerous drug dealers are frequently well armed and use counter surveillance techniques which add to the danger to law enforcement and the community.

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<sup>5</sup> Fentanyl laced heroin is a very dangerous public health risk. Dealers lace an already deadly heroin with the synthetic opioid, which creates an elevated risk of respiratory arrest and death.

<sup>6</sup> As soon as we recognize the impact of fentanyl as a component of the overdose situation, we learn of other analogs such as carfentanil emerging opioid analogs that further to threaten our communities.

<sup>7</sup> While my county has been somewhat insulated by being removed from the urban center of Milwaukee, we do experience these crimes.

## **Immigration Status and Crime**

The thrust of my testimony has been on border security as it relates to drug trafficking. This is because my fellow Sheriffs, Police Chiefs, and I see this as the greatest border-related threat to our communities. My testimony would be incomplete, however, if I failed to acknowledge the criminal threat posed by foreign nationals that are in our our country in violation of our immigration statutes. Candidly, I see criminal offenses by foreign nationals as relatively infrequent occurrence within the confines of my county's boarder. It would be incorrect, and in fact dangerous to conclude however, that these events do not occur in Wisconsin.

Several specific examples include:<sup>8</sup>

A Drug Trafficking Organization (DTO) involving at least two undocumented Mexican Nationals where 15 kg of cocaine was seized.

A DTO containing several undocumented Mexican Nationals was attempting to illegally sell firearms to undercover agents. This DTO also had human trafficking ties.

A recent 25 kg seizure of methamphetamine resulted in the arrest of several undocumented Mexican Nationals in SE Wisconsin. The actors in this case were purporting the methamphetamine to be cocaine in hopes of expanding the organization's methamphetamine market and aid in its distribution.

Many other examples exist.<sup>9</sup>

## **Federal Intervention and Assistance**

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<sup>8</sup> Other examples include-

- An Illegal Mexican National who was distributing Methamphetamine to western Wisconsin communities who ultimate fled the jurisdiction and remains at large.
- Two undocumented Mexican Nationals were arrested in SE Wisconsin with 3 kg of cocaine and 6 illegal firearms.

<sup>9</sup> Prior to my completing the draft of my testimony, I spoke with leadership from many agencies within my State including the Milwaukee office of the DEA. From these discussions I have distilled numerous significant drug trafficking cases involving undocumented Mexican Nationals who were directly involved in high level drug trafficking and other criminal activity. Some are mentioned in this oral statement. The drug trafficking business is responsible for the lion's share of violent and property crimes in our communities.

I have included a copy of the National Sheriff's Association Position Paper on Comprehensive Immigration Reform. I respectfully ask that you to consider all recommendations.<sup>10</sup> In particular I would hope that a strong focus is placed on providing appropriations to:

- adequately secure the boarder which would include providing sufficient law enforcement presence in the form of CBP Officers, and
- sufficiently support the highly effective HIDTA programs, and the Edward Byrne Justice Assistance Grant.

## Conclusion

It is truly an honor to be here today. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

Respectfully Submitted,

Sheriff Eric J. Severson

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<sup>10</sup> Of particular importance are the recommendations relating to border security and local community drug impact which include:

- The effective and efficient securing of the southern and northern borders by the Federal Government.
- The appropriation of the funding necessary to substantially increase the number of immigration and customs enforcement (ICE) agents.
- An increase in agents is critical to securing and patrolling the nations borders, particularly along the South West border. A substantial increase in Customs and Border Patrol (CBP) agents also alleviates the burden of border security from local law enforcement. Greater security at our nation's borders means fewer law enforcement challenges to non-border communities.
- The appropriation of funding to build necessary infrastructure along the boarder to allow for more efficient patrol of critical areas, as well as the effective use of sensor and aviation technology to improve border surveillance.
- Full funding for the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (known as Byrne JAG). Byrne JAG provides vital funding to local law enforcement agencies to operate multi-jurisdictional drug and gang task forces.
- Full funding for the HIDTA program.

## Appendix 1

### Background - Waukesha County Demographic

Waukesha County is situated directly west of Milwaukee County, the most populated county in Wisconsin, and approximately 25 miles east of Dane County, the second most populated county in the state. The county is a rapidly growing area for upscale, residential subdivisions with five of the ten wealthiest zip codes in the Milwaukee metropolitan area.

Waukesha County, population 396,488 (2015 US Census), offers a blend of urban and rural living. Overall population of the county grew 1.7% between April 2010 and July 1, 2015. The population consists of 93.4% white, 1.5% black/African American, 3.4% Asian and 4.7% Hispanic/Latino. The median household income from 2011-2015 was \$76,545 and per capita income \$36,684.

While Wisconsin currently has lower immigration rates than many other states, the foreign-born population is growing. The Federation of American Immigration Reform estimates that between the 2000 census and July 2008, Wisconsin's population increased by about 58,365 residents from net international migration (more foreign-born arriving than leaving). This is an annual average increase of about 7,995 foreign-born residents, representing more than one-fourth of the state's total population increase during that period. (Wisconsin Extended Immigration Data – FAIR Federation of American Immigration Reform June 2011) Foreign-born residents make up an estimated 5% of the Waukesha County population. (2015 US Census)

The 2014-2017 Waukesha County Department of University of Wisconsin-Extension Strategic Plan notes that the poverty rate in Waukesha County increased from 3% in 2000 to 5% in 2010. This is lower than the state rate but impacts almost 20,000 people in the county. Census block data reveals that poverty rates are much higher for Latino/a and African-American populations in the county. In Waukesha County, 13% of children in schools are eligible for free and reduced lunch. In the City of Waukesha, Waukesha County's largest city, the number of elementary schools that became eligible for free and reduced lunch programs increased from one in 2001 to six in 2012. The 2035 Regional Housing Plan for Southeastern Wisconsin recommended reducing the concentration of minorities in the region's central cities (SEWRPC, 2013). This concentration of minorities is continuing to grow in neighborhoods surrounding

downtown Waukesha. In these neighborhoods, the number of Latinos/as and African Americans continues to grow. Poverty rates for these minority families exceed 25%.

Also per the 2014-2017 Waukesha County Department of University of Wisconsin-Extension Strategic Plan, minority populations in Waukesha County are growing at a faster rate than white populations. In 2010, almost 10% of the total county population was minority. Between 2000 and 2010, the Latino/a population in Waukesha County grew by 6,620 residents. This was the sixth highest county growth in the state. In 2010, 5% of the state's Latino/a population (16,123) resided in Waukesha County. Between 2000 and 2010, every city, village, and town in the county experienced growth in the Latino/a population except for two villages (UW-Extension, 2014). Collectively, Latinos/as make up the population of one county board district in Waukesha County. Waukesha County is one of eight counties in the state where 80% of the Latino/a population lives and works (UW-Extension, 2014). For the first time, between 2000 and 2010 the Latino/a population that was born in Wisconsin exceeded the number of Latino/a residents born outside of the United States (UW-Extension, 2014). The growing Latino/a population is important for Waukesha County, as a greater proportion (more than 23%) are employed in manufacturing. Another 18% of the Latino/a population is employed in arts, entertainment, accommodation and food service. The Latino/a population also has a younger median age (23-years-old) and a larger household size (3.4 persons). Latinos/as are also entrepreneurial, as they own and operate over 5,000 businesses in Wisconsin.

Asian and African-American populations continue to grow in the County as well. For example, 10% of the student population in the Elmbrook School District located in Waukesha County is Asian, and 10% of the student population in the Menomonee Falls School District, also located within the county is African American. The growth in diversity is further explained by changes over the past ten years in the City of Waukesha. The City of Waukesha had 70,718 residents in 2010. The city's growth was slightly lower than Waukesha County's from 2000 to 2010. One major trend in the City of Waukesha is growing diversity. The city grew in population from 64,825 in 2000 to 70,718 in 2010. During this period, the Latino/a population grew from 5,563 to 8,529, the Asian population grew from 1,407 to 2,502, and the Black or African-American population grew from 861 to 1,570. The city as a whole grew by 5,893 people from 2000 to 2010. The total growth in population of the Latino/a population, Asian population, and Black or African-American population in the City of Waukesha



between 2000 and 2010 was 4,770. These populations were responsible for 80% of the population growth in the City of Waukesha between 2000 and 2010. Currently over 12% of the population, counted by the U.S. Census, in the City of Waukesha is Latino/a. This percentage is over twice the state average.

According to the Office of National Drug Control Policy High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Program in Southeastern Wisconsin, Wisconsin's population, being located on the northern border of the United States and near major source cities Chicago and Minneapolis, make the state a destination state for illegal drugs and drug activity. Wisconsin HIDTA threat assessments found that the vast majority of drugs enter Wisconsin via passenger vehicles on one of the major highways intersecting the state. The threat assessments also indicate that opioid abuse, including both heroin and prescription drug abuse, remain the number one drug threat in Wisconsin. The vast majority of heroin in Wisconsin is sourced from Chicago-based traffickers with connections to the southwest border of the United States and the major Mexican cartels. Wisconsin traffickers, in particular Milwaukee-based traffickers, will often travel 90 miles south to Chicagoland area several times per week and return with 100-150 gram quantities of heroin usually of the Mexican or South American variety.

## Appendix 2

### Action-Based Solutions by Local Government

Local solutions and programs bring relief to citizens. Local law enforcement is best suited to understand geographic community needs and solutions based on the expectations of citizens.

The Metropolitan Drug Enforcement Unit (Metro) was formed in 1985 when the Sheriff and Waukesha County Chiefs of Police recognized a cooperative effort in fighting drugs and drug dealing was best for the community. The Waukesha County Sheriff's Department has administered the program since its inception which works closely with many local, state and federal agencies. In 2016, the Metro Unit completed several long-term drug investigations. These extensive investigations compiled 289 drug buys, 24 search warrants, \$35,153 in seized funds and 15 seized vehicles.

Metro also works jointly with the Office of National Drug Control Policy High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area Program (HIDTA) in southeastern Wisconsin to apply enhanced intelligence processes and greater operational coordination and prosecution to reduce organized drug distribution, drug related violent crime and money laundering, and the demand for illegal drugs. The program also strives to halt the distribution of illegal drugs through the Milwaukee HIDTA to urban areas throughout Wisconsin and beyond. Through this cooperative effort, in 2016 Waukesha County experienced the following activity:

300 HIDTA Initiative Cases Opened

400 Incidents of Provided Analytical Support and Assistance to Other Agencies

93 Cases Referred

14 Warrants Executed

\$86K Spent on Drug Buys

Controlled Substances Seized/Purchased Included:

176 Grams Heroin

9 Marijuana Plants

33,696 Grams Marijuana

85 Grams Cocaine

88 MDMA

117 Doses of Alprazolam

70 Grams of Amphetamine

30 Grams of Methamphetamine

73 Doses of Oxycodone  
80 Doses of Sub Oxone  
181 Grams of Psilocybin  
437 Doses of LSD  
5 Doses of Percocet

In reaction to community demand, in 2016 the Waukesha County Board approved an additional full time detective position to work exclusively on drug-related cases. Adding more police officers and adopting strong, proven management techniques has been proven to reduce the rate of crime. (What Caused the Crime Decline? 2015, Oliver Roeder, Lauren-Brook "L.B." Eisen, Julia Bowling)

In response to the current heroin and prescription opiate crisis, Waukesha County Sheriff's Department Deputies employ automatic external defibrillator (AED)/Narcan kits. Deployment of Narcan, an opioid antagonist used to reverse opioid overdoses, helped reduce drug-related deaths 34% between 2012 and 2013. In 2016, the department deployed 48 automatic external defibrillator (AED)/Narcan kits. Of the 21 incidents where Narcan was administered alone or in combination with an AED, deputies revived 17 people. (The number of Waukesha County Sheriff's Department Narcan deployments is lower than county-wide actuals because the department works in tandem with area fire departments on medically-related calls which could include the administration of Narcan.)

The Waukesha County Sheriff's Department works closely with the Waukesha County District Attorney's Office to pursue and prosecute Len Bias charges. The departments also cooperate closely to utilize Good Samaritan Laws, which were enacted to remove the fear of calling police and emergency services for help during an overdose situation for people suffering from addiction.

### Appendix 3

#### SCAAP

The Bureau of Justice Assistance State Criminal Alien Assistance Program (SCAAP) reimburses state and local governments for the partial costs of incarcerating unauthorized immigrants who have committed felonies or at least two misdemeanor convictions for violations of state or local law and who are incarcerated for at least four consecutive days. Waukesha County can be reimbursed 100% of jail personnel costs incurred for inmates born outside of the United States. The reimbursement rate drops to 85% of personnel costs for inmates whose country of birth is unknown. SCAAP does not reimburse costs for housing, feeding, or providing medical care to these prisoners.

Federal funding for SCAAP fluctuated from \$130 million in FY1995 to \$565 million in FY2002 to \$238 million in FY2013 according to the Federal Funds Information for States. In FY2013, this amount covered only 18% of state costs for housing unauthorized immigrants.

SCAAP funding for Waukesha County Jail expenses for unauthorized immigrants falls woefully short of providing reimbursement of actual costs. Between 2012 to 2016, slightly less than 17% of total costs for unauthorized immigrants in Waukesha County was covered by SCAAP payments.

#### Waukesha County SCAAP Awards

Year	Per Diem Cost	Total Costs	Award Amount	Shortfall
2016	\$44.40	\$151,290	\$26,147	-\$125,143
2015	\$45.69	\$202,447	\$31,060	-\$171,387
2014	\$44.50	\$235,391	\$35,374	-\$200,017
2013	\$38.56	\$184,456	\$35,027	-\$149,432
2012	\$38.06	\$199,594	\$36,797	-\$162,797

## Biography of Waukesha County Sheriff Eric Severson

Severson serves the citizens of Waukesha County as Sheriff having served as a law enforcement officer for 32 years. Sheriff Severson maintains executive oversight of all activities of the office to include sworn operations, jail, work-release and administrative functions and has served in the Waukesha County Sheriff's Office for more than 30 years; 25 of those years in supervisory and command positions throughout the department. In addition to patrol command assignments, Sheriff Severson has commanded the department's Metropolitan Drug Enforcement Unit, Tactical Enforcement Unit (SWAT), K9 Unit and was the founder and first President of the Wisconsin Law Enforcement Canine Handler Association (WLECHA).



Sheriff Severson holds two bachelor's degrees from UW-Platteville in both criminal justice and technical communication. He holds a minor in business administration. He is also a graduate of the FBI National Academy, Class 219, as well as the Drug Enforcement Administration's Drug Unit Commander Academy. Sheriff Severson also graduated from the National Sheriff's Academy in Aurora Colorado.

Eric Severson is a member and serves on the board of directors of the National Sheriffs' Association. He is a past chairman of the board of directors for the Wisconsin High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA), and is the longest tenured member of the Wisconsin HIDTA Board of Directors. Sheriff Severson is a member of the FBI National Academy Association, the Badger State Sheriff's Association (serving on the legislative committee), and the Wisconsin Sheriffs' and Deputy Sheriffs' Association. In 2015, Sheriff Severson was appointed by the Wisconsin Supreme Court to serve on the Supreme Court of Wisconsin Appointment Selection Committee.

Eric is also an avid aviation enthusiast who holds a private pilot certificate and owns, maintains and flies his own aircraft. He is a member of the Airplane Owners and Pilots Association and the Experimental Aircraft Association. He is also in the process of building an airplane in his home workshop. Eric serves on

the planning board for the local air show that has been held annually at the Waukesha County Airport.

Eric is married to his wife Michele of over 29 years and has three adult children.