

Opening Statement
Senator Joseph Lieberman
Chair, Governmental Affairs Committee
"Ecstasy Use Rises: What More Needs to be
Done by the Government to Combat the Problem?"

July 30, 2001

Good morning. Thank you all for being here. This morning, the Governmental Affairs Committee will begin to examine the threat posed by the drug Ecstasy and the government's response to increasing Ecstasy use and abuse by our nation's youth. I began to hear about Ecstasy earlier this year from concerned parents and the media. In April, I asked to meet with law enforcement, parents, and children in Connecticut. I learned that Ecstasy is entering our country in ever-growing quantities, that the increase in use by our nation's youth has reached arguably epidemic proportions, and that despite the evidence to the contrary, kids don't think Ecstasy is a harmful drug. What I don't know is if the government is doing all that it can to stop the continued spread of this drug. That's what we will explore at this hearing.

According to a recent study, the number of 8th graders using Ecstasy at least once in the past year increased 82 percent between 1999 and 2000, and the number of those using it within the past month increased 75 percent. While the overall percentage of our young people using this drug remains relatively low in absolute terms, the U.S. Customs Service reports that its Ecstasy seizures have surged 165 percent between Fiscal Year 1999 and 2000. These are frightening statistics, which were brought home to me, literally, this past April, when I met with parents, teachers, and Connecticut law enforcement officials. Ecstasy is a problem at raves and schools, in cities and suburbs. In fact, on the very same day I was at a meeting with law enforcers about this drug, police arrested an individual who was trying to use a methamphetamine lab to manufacture Ecstasy in the small Connecticut town of North Stonington.

During my meetings in Connecticut, I was surprised to learn not only how dramatically Ecstasy use is increasing among young people, but also how so many of those young people mistakenly believe it does them no harm. Ecstasy is far from benign; its dangers are well documented and painfully experienced. Ecstasy is toxic to the human nervous system. It can lead to kidney and cardiovascular failure. It can overload the heart, causing attacks or strokes. And, especially troubling, because we are talking about kids here, the drug can impede a user's ability to learn and remember. Because this drug is beginning to do serious damage to young people in our country, we have an obligation to educate and warn them and their parents of its danger and an obligation to coordinate federal, state, and local law enforcement agencies against Ecstasy.

We are going to start today's hearing by listening to the troubling tales of two young people -- Dayna Moore and Philip McCarthy -- who are now fighting their addictions to Ecstasy. I have a feeling that your testimony will make this hearing worthwhile and send a message to other teenagers. They will offer us first-hand insight into how and why this drug becomes so appealing to so many of our youth. We will then hear from a panel of federal, state, and local officials. Dr. Alan Leshner of the National Institute of Drug Abuse will help us put to rest any remaining belief that Ecstasy is not a harmful drug. Dr. Donald Vereen of the Office of National Drug Control Policy -- also known as the Drug Czar's office -- will offer us an overview of the many

facets of our government's war on this particular drug. Mr. Joseph Keefe, the Chief of Operations at DEA and a representative from the Customs Commissioner's office who will tell us of the challenges Ecstasy poses to federal law enforcement. And, Miami-Dade police officer Roy Rutland – who will testify behind a screen because much of his work is undercover – and Connecticut State's Attorney Jack Bailey will give a state and local law enforcement's perspective on this epidemic.

Today, I hope these federal, state, and local officials will provide a comprehensive picture of what government is and isn't doing right now, and what we in Congress can do to help them do more. I want to welcome all of these witnesses, but offer a special welcome to Jack Bailey, an old friend. I am especially interested in hearing from him about the success Connecticut has had in fighting Ecstasy through his office's Nuisance Abatement Unit.

I look forward to hearing from all of our witnesses today on what we can do to help them win this new war on the drug Ecstasy.

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