

A Message from the Prosecuting Attorney

We all should have a concern about drug and alcohol abuse in our community. It promotes a lifestyle of greed and violence, and steals the innocence of our youth. It destroys health, careers, and lives. It wrecks families and ruins marriages and other relationships. It costs us billions of dollars every year in lost productivity on the job. It is a scourge.

Prevention and education are the ultimate keys to reversing the upward trend of drug abuse in our society. Central to this effort is the development and implementation of initiatives to prevent illicit drug use, including casual use by our youth and other high-risk populations. The most effective strategies for preventing drug use, keeping drugs out of neighborhoods and schools, and providing a safe and secure environment for all people, are cooperative efforts that mobilize and involve all elements of a community. Schools, churches, community groups, and law enforcement; all can help us turn the tide on drug and alcohol abuse. But none can take a parent's place. Drug education should begin at home. We must offer a disciplined environment to our children conducive to learning. We recognize that our schools, our workplaces, and our communities cannot be places where education comes first unless and until they are drug free.

Drug addiction is a disease, and anyone suffering from a disease needs treatment. But many chronic drug users and addicts also are criminals who violate the rights of others in our society. In these instances, a balance must be achieved between sanctions for criminal activity and treatment of an addictive disease. There is compelling evidence that treatment is cost-effective in the long run, and provides significant public safety benefits by breaking the cycle of drug use and crime. However, criminal acts must be punished, and tough sanctions often are needed to compel drug-addicted criminals to stop using drugs and committing crimes.

A significant percentage of the people in our jails and prisons are there because of drug problems. I would estimate that at least 80% of the crimes committed in Porter County are the result of drug or alcohol abuse. Possession and Dealing, the so-called "victimless" crimes, are only the tip of the iceberg.

Crimes committed while under the influence of drugs or alcohol, including Murder, Rape, and Battery as well as DUI, represent a serious threat to our safety. Crimes committed to obtain the money necessary to support drug habits or to pay drug debts, including Burglary, Robbery and Theft, are never ending. While vast taxpayer resources are necessary for law enforcement and prisons, it must be remembered that in many cases the costs to society would be even greater if we allowed the drug and alcohol abuser to continue a criminal lifestyle on the street.

Drugs subject our children, our families, and our communities to pressures unheard of a generation ago. The great myth of my generation, that the personal use of drugs is OK, has survived and flourished in the past 25 years. As community leaders, it must be our goal to reverse this frightening trend.

It is important to remember that these problems and issues cannot be addressed in a vacuum. The death penalty for first time offenders and a policeman on every corner will not solve the problem. Prevention, education and treatment are at least of equal importance. Short-term law enforcement "fixes" are just that -- short-term.

We do not need new statutes which call for greater punishments for drug-related crimes. Indiana already has some of the most severe penalties in the nation. On the other hand, deterrence can have very little meaning if all those convicted are merely placed on probation and

given "treatment." If it were that easy, we would have no problem. We must recognize that it is essential that we combat this problem on all fronts, looking for long-range solutions instead of short-term fixes. We must emphasize education and treatment as well as aggressive law enforcement. The old saying "you can pay me now, or you can pay me later" is true. I've seen it over the last 20 years as a Prosecutor. If we don't spend the time now, we will all be paying later.

Brian Gensel,
Porter County Prosecuting Attorney