

Sauk County Law Enforcement Roundtable by Marti Prorok

Thirty-five law enforcement, public health and community leaders met at the Sauk County Law Enforcement Center in Baraboo July 21st to discuss current issues affecting public safety. Discussion was moderated by WI District Attorney Brad Schmiel who was making a 72-county information-gathering tour of Wisconsin.

Prescription drug, meth, heroin abuse are of great concern. Schmiel opened discussion by stating that heroin abuse is still a concern in Wisconsin but the state is also experiencing a 300% increase of methamphetamine abuse. Meth is highly addictive and can result in paranoia and unpredictable, violent behavior.

Schmiel went on to say, "Meth is scary. The drug problem is like a sinking boat; we keep bailing but there's a giant hole in the boat. We have had some success with opiates. The focus is on prevention, but there's no clear pathway with meth."

Discussion turned to mental health care funding which affects the treatment of drug addiction. Lake Delton Police Chief Daniel Hardman stated that there are no psychiatric beds available in Sauk County because they're not profitable. The nearest treatment facility requires a 4-hour transport by two police officers. "This is a lengthy process because prisoners can be violent up to 12 hours. We used to go to a private facility in LaCrosse or Boscobel but they're out of business. The State should regionalize hospitals."

Sauk County Sheriff Chip Meister added, "We offered to rent an unused jail as an offsite of the Mendota facility. The county would add parking. DHA wanted oversight but there was no follow-through."

Schmiel agreed, saying, "It's a vicious cycle: The untreated person self-medicates with drugs and ends up with addicted babies. There is a great need for consistent, standardized medical services." Current policy terminates BadgerCare during incarceration. After the sentence is served, it would be much easier to restart a suspended BadgerCare policy as opposed to one that has been terminated.

In regard to the statewide shortage of prosecutors, Sauk County District Attorney Kevin Calkins stated, "We are two prosecutors short. We support the [hiring of a] Prosecutor Counsel." Schmiel replied, "We have had two decades of staffing shortage. We are now 120 short. The Legislature wants a better plan. That's why we want a Prosecutor General who can make decisions regarding staffing."

He explained that it is difficult to find experienced staff given the salary and overtime restrictions. The District Attorney's office is not able to hire outside counsel like other organizations can.

There is still an increased need to continue funding for law enforcement training. Baraboo Police Chief Mark Schauf acknowledged the benefits of training for his officers, "We have had ACE training (in which they learn to recognize how Adverse Childhood Experiences contributes to violent behavior as an adult) but now we are at the State minimum of \$160 for training. To get the best cops, we need more money."

Schmiel thanked Roundtable for their comments, saying, "No one wants to be called soft on crime. I will bring this to the Department of Justice and Department of Corrections. It's bleak but changing. Ten years ago, no one talked about ACEs. We've made the change. Officers now carry Narcan [for emergency treatment of opioid overdose]. We're enacting Good Samaritan Laws; we've come so far. I'm encouraged by the progress we're making, for example, the mandatory Prescription Monitoring program [to track opioid use]. We are making new attempts with a new perspective. We're asking more of health, police and the Drug Enforcement Agency. Take care of your people. The day-to-day witness of these events affect them. Reach out to us for help."

Sidebar: Sauk County Sheriff Chip Meister on Crime Prevention

After the Roundtable discussion of short- and long-term goals, Sheriff Meister was asked what citizens can do right now to prevent crime.

"We don't have many clusters of crime but when there's a rash, we place announcements of concerns on FaceBook. Residents can join the Sauk County Sheriff's page. We also distribute pamphlets in affected neighborhoods.

Here are some of the Sheriff's simple but effective tips to protect your property:

Don't leave your vehicles unlocked with valuables in view and certainly **don't leave your keys in the ignition.**

Use motion and timer lights. When you leave town, **ask the Sheriffs' Office to send a car to do a home check.** Request this by completing the form on the website. He cautions, "Don't be so flagrant about posting your trips on FaceBook. Do that when you return."

Thieves used to break into a home and steal the television; now' it's "grab and go," pocketing cash and jewelry for a quick sale. They also take power tools because they don't have serial numbers. Thieves check your medicine cabinet for pain killers like oxycodone.

Sauk has an agreement with Madison and Milwaukee pawn shops to track what's coming in; however, thieves are now selling stolen goods over the Illinois border. Stolen goods also make their way to *ebay*. The detectives suggest Wisconsin create a registry with other states to track them.

Sauk County is nonetheless a safe place to live and work. We have all the crime of the big city but not much. There isn't a lot of neighborhood crime. Sometimes a traveling burglar passes through, hitting several counties but we work well with other agencies and counties to apprehend them.

The bottom line is **"If you see something, say something."** You won't ever get in trouble for calling 911. Whenever possible, call 911 from your home phone because this will give us your location. When you use a track phone, it is hard to geo-validate and we're often given the cell tower location instead of the address." Non-emergency calls can be made to 608-356-4895.