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U.S. Department of Justice
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
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Attorney General Jeff Sessions,

This is one way a rural Sheriff's office is dealing with a nationwide epidemic of opiates and other drugs along with building trust with police officers is through education. We have no monies to fight the war on drugs in a very rural area. Our State drug task forces works within the cities. Over the past three years, I have requested Senator Leahy to change the Federal grants for fighting the opiate problem from State agencies to include local and county sheriff's. I am thankful that Senator Leahy has secured monies for Vermont.

Thank You in advance for taking the time and reading our letter.

Please feel free to contact me at any time.

Sheriff William Bohnyak

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A staggering amount of the young adolescents in Vermont are engaging in dangerous behavior according to the Vermont Department of Health 2016 study. Orange County Vermont is a rural community which covers 692 square miles with approximately 5,329 adolescents who reside within it. In the 2016 Vermont Department of Health study, it states many of these adolescents were reported to have increased levels of drug use which includes underage drinking, marijuana use, and taking prescription pain medications such as opioids not prescribed to them. These adolescents also reported to have a laid back attitude about their drug and alcohol use. When comparing the statistics from the Vermont study, it was astounding to find Orange County's youth between the ages of 10-20 rated dramatically higher in most categories, such as binge drinking and marijuana use, compared to the entire youth population in Vermont. Additionally, those youths who participated in this study also reported feeling it was either fairly easy, or very easy to obtain both alcohol and illegal drugs.

This important and very concerning issue has left the local police agencies in Orange County scrambling to find new ways in dealing with the ever growing illegal drug abuse issues that are negatively impacting Vermont's adolescent population. Sheriff William Bonhyak has been working on possible solutions to this ever growing problem within Orange County. The Sheriff became aware of the L.E.A.D program in 2015. This program was developed by New Jersey police departments in conjunction with the Mendez foundation program "Too Good for Drugs/Too Good for Violence." This program is a researched fact based program instructed to school aged children. It focuses not only on opioid use, but also other illegal drugs such as street drugs, prescription narcotics, tobacco and alcohol use, including a message of anti-bullying in and out of school. The L.E.A.D program's curriculum is developed for school aged children

from kindergarten through high school giving them age appropriate facts. In addition, L.E.A.D provides these children with self esteem building exercises, and lessons which allow them to have the proper language and strategies to avoid unhealthy choices, and to steer clear of bad situations. This program's focuses on teaching students how to make positive decisions for their growing mind and body. Students are being prepared for their future by leaving them with the message that the decisions they make today, will have a direct impact on their future.

Orange County now currently has three L.E.A.D instructors. These officers are able to service 10 schools, and 23 classes from grades 3rd through 8th. The 385 students who are in this program are actively engaged in what is being taught to them by the L.E.A.D instructors. These instructors not only provide the class with important lessons, but also provide the students with a chance to get to know the police officer. Instructors go into the classrooms and speak with the children about age appropriate real life experiences they get from the field. They have seen firsthand what drugs and alcohol abuse, violence and overall bad decision making has caused offenders directly, and how their choices at a young age has indeed impacted them directly today. L.E.A.D instructors also build healthy relationships with their students while they are in the classrooms. These relationships then foster connections, and have allowed the students to share their own experiences and concerns with theses officers, which are real to the Orange County youths. As the trust of these children grow, so does the relationships between the officers and the school staff, parents and community members who are made aware about this program from their children and their classroom teachers. In Orange County we also have a L.E.A.D instructor who not only instructs this program to the children, but is also able to certify other new hopeful instructors so they too may enter the classrooms and talk to the children about L.E.A.D.

Another ever growing concern of parents, students and school staff is the increase in gun violence that is now taking place within our schools. This concern is very real to the children and teaching staff who feel they are at great risk of becoming victims, and are most concerned about their overall wellbeing. Parents who send their children to school want to know it's the one place their children will be safe. Parents also want to know the schools will also provide a stress free learning environment, but today this doesn't seem to be so. More and more students and teachers are at risk of becoming a victim of gun violence. The question that has been asked includes, "How can we make our schools safe?" Should we arm our teachers? Should schools hire security? How about having an SRO (School Resource Officer) in schools? There are no perfect answers, but the better of these choices should be having an SRO in the schools. If schools were able to have an SRO, a trained police officer, even for a few hours a day or week, the parents, students and the school staff would know they would be much safer verses not having any form of security. Having a trained police officer will elevate the issue if arming a teacher or school staff member. A police officer is required a great deal of training through the Vermont Criminal Justice Training Council before they become certified officers. Their ability to then deal with stressful situations are part of the many hours of training, which is not so for the average teacher. Police officers know and understand they might be required to take a life, or lose their own life while protecting the innocent. Asking a teacher who is trained in educating children may have a difficult time being asked to be placed in a life or death situation. Will a teacher physically protect their students? The answer is, absolutely; could they take a human life? That is a much more difficult question to answer, maybe. If an active shooter enters a classroom and knows the teacher is armed, this teacher now becomes the primary target. Most criminals fear law enforcement personnel, they don't view teachers as a real threat. A well trained SRO officer will

be able to keep the students and staff safe, all while building a healthy relationship between them. This would also become a community building opportunity in order to bring law enforcement officers, school children, teachers, administration and parents together which would allow them to work as a team. Plus, when there is a marked police cruiser parked outside the school, the community will know they are there, and if someone wanted to harm anyone in or around the school, they might think twice. However, until a decision is made on whether or not having an SRO in schools is the best option, our L.E.A.D instructors are already the first line of defense. These officers are in the classrooms everyday building relationships, all while keeping those who attend these schools safe. Plus, these officers have a marked patrol car outside these schools, which will act as a deterrent to those individuals who decide they want to cause harm and panic within the schools walls and property.

A well oiled community can and will raise more responsible children who are now better equipped in making healthy decisions, and possibly avoid any illegal activity. Children will then feel comfortable enough to be able to report to the police officer about any illegal drug use taking place in, and out of the classroom. Since L.E.A.D has been introduced into local schools, we are building positive healthy relationships with the children, their parents, and school officials. It also gives the students another trusted adult to whom they can turn to in a time of crisis. The more information children receive about a healthy life style, and how consequences can have a direct impact on them, they will learn to first stop and think before they make any decisions.

Vermont has a lot of great ideas in dealing with these drug issues, first by incorporating the L.E.A.D program along with healthy community building relationships, keeping the students and staff safe, but there is a drawback. Ideas cost money, and lots of it. The L.E.A.D program is paid

for by donation only, which leaves local police agencies with a big financial burden. In Orange County local businesses have donated money to try and support L.E.A.D, but there are not enough businesses in Orange County to sustain this program long term. The ultimate goal would be to incorporate this program into every school within the state of Vermont, but this would require some serious funding assistance. Any state funding that Vermont receives to help fight the drug issues from the local government, little to none of this funding seems to make its way down into the local police agencies budgets. Vermont is a small state with big issues, and we now need to turn to the Federal Government for their help and support if we're ever going to stand a chance in winning the drug battle. Orange County is looking for grants, not only to help fund and grow the L.E.A.D program, but also to help purchase future equipment and supplies.

Sincerely,

Deputy Ken Schaffer LEAD Instructor

Sergeant Gail Lund-Rowell LEAD Instructor

Sheriff William Bohnyak