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**Senate Majority Policy Committee and
House Republican Policy Committee on Crime
Crime Trends and Solutions
August 10, 2026**

**Written Remarks of
Luzerne County District Attorney
Samuel M. Sanguedolce**

To the Members of the Policy Committees:

Introduction:

As the District Attorney of Luzerne County, I submit the following as to Crime Trends in Luzerne County.

For nearly twenty-five years, Luzerne County has employed, appointed, and now elected me to serve in the county prosecutor's office. Throughout that time, we have seen drastic fluctuations in both volume and types of crime, as well as the manner by which we approach attacking, reducing, and resolving such burdens on our residents, guests, and taxpayers.

2026 Crime Trends:

The most glaring of all trends is the vast reduction in fentanyl cases, and not surprisingly, overdose deaths.

In the early 2000s through the next fifteen or so years, Luzerne County saw the expansion of drug use, and relatedly, drug sales, evolve from cocaine-based products to heroin. Approaching 2020, the opioid crisis and its offspring, the scourge of fentanyl, swamped our communities. As the opioid crisis began to affect families of all walks of life, the outlook on combating this evil greatly evolved.

Much like the nation's outlook, Luzerne County's police and prosecutors conceded that this problem was not one we could arrest and incarcerate to a cure. Courts, probation officers, and treatment professionals all began to work together forming Treatment Courts and alternate methods of fighting substance use disorder to see the best success rates in decades.

In 2026, coinciding with the securing of the southern border, fentanyl has had a difficult time making its way into our communities. Fentanyl and its derivatives have been traced back to China and known to be entering illegally across the southern border. Unfortunately, its absence has not diminished the demand for illegal, mind-altering controlled substances. Our latest trends show an increase in the use, production, and sale of methamphetamines, a more locally made substance.

As our narcotics officers attack this renewed problem, fortunately, overdose deaths have greatly decreased. Where in recent years past, we would see nearly 125 deaths by this point in the year, we have now tallied about 30. Far too many to suffer of course, but a vast improvement from prior years.

Violent Crime:

Luzerne County, in the last twenty years, has been known to average in the mid-teens in homicides. Admittedly, the rates are cyclical, meaning we see high and low years without logical explanation. This year, we are reservedly surprised to see we have had two homicides as of July.

"Victimless" Crimes

Please note the above quotation marks reflecting that we in law enforcement do not believe any crime is victimless (see overdose deaths from recreational smoking of marijuana or the murder of the Hazleton store clerk by the patron playing the Skill Machine).

"Skill Machines"

In partnership with the Pennsylvania District Attorney's Association, the Luzerne County District Attorney's Office supports the regulation of the gambling devices known as "Skill" games. With casinos having been made legal and Pennsylvania reaping the benefit of a nearly fifty-five percent (55%) tax, it is difficult to argue the immorality of gambling. Nonetheless, we have seen the opening of what amounts to mini-casinos which result in a draw on resources, additional crime in the area, and financial difficulties for families whose members suffer from a gambling addiction.

Recreational Marijuana

A known controversial subject, many legislators are looking for the income that will result from the legalization, sale, and taxing of recreational marijuana. We are extremely trepidatious about such a major change in legislation which essentially tells the community that use of marijuana is safe.

The cities having attempted this exercise already, have seen immense upticks in crime, emergency responses, and hospitalizations (e.g. – *Colorado*).

Additionally, it is difficult to ignore the hotly debated topic as to whether marijuana is in fact a gateway to more severe controlled substances.

Finally, any intimation that legalization will eliminate, or even injure, the black market is misguided. The costs of meeting government requirements, regulation, and taxing have proven to only assist the black market. More people start using a regulated substance and then begin to look for cheaper alternatives when the substance becomes too expensive.

Conclusion:

Our office does not profess to have all the answers, and more particularly do not wish to replace our judgement for that of the legislators elected by the people to represent their views. Conversely, we thank the members of the Senate and House and the Committees responsible for today's session for listening to our views and allowing us to weigh in on debated topics. Moreover, we appreciate their continued support in the ongoing fight against crime and the protection of our victims and neighborhoods.