

**STATEMENT OF DONALD R. VEREEN, JR., M.D., M.P.H.
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OFFICE OF NATIONAL DRUG CONTROL POLICY
BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE, DRUG POLICY, AND
HUMAN RESOURCES**

“Reauthorization of the Drug-Free Communities Act”

June 28, 2001

Introduction

Chairman Souder, Ranking Member Cummings, distinguished members of the subcommittee, the Office of National Drug Control Policy (ONDCP) welcomes this opportunity to discuss the Drug-Free Communities Program. In 1997, Congress authorized this program and, with the support it provides, America’s community coalitions continue to work effectively to prevent substance abuse among young people. Communities with diverse economic, social, and cultural demographics across our nation are utilizing their Drug-Free Communities grants to leverage substantial additional resources through cooperation with the private sector and state and local governments. I would like to thank Congressmen Portman and Levin and all of the leaders in the House of Representatives who have set an example with coalitions in their districts and signed on as sponsors of this important legislation.

Background

The Drug-Free Communities Act of 1997 (Section 1023 of the National Narcotics Leadership Act of 1988 (21 U.S.C. 1523)) (DFCA) enjoyed tremendous bipartisan support in both the United States House and Senate. Rob Portman and Sander Levin in the House, and Charles Grassley and Joseph Biden in the Senate led the effort to provide support for coalitions through this effective locally-controlled program. The DFCA authorizes ONDCP to award federal matching grants to community coalitions. Coalitions work to reduce substance abuse among youth, strengthen collaboration among organizations and agencies in both the private and public sectors, and serve as catalysts for increased citizen participation in our efforts to combat drug abuse. Coalitions use data from all available sources to assess effectively the threat substance abuse poses in their community and develop action plans to address that threat.

Grantees

We are proud that the program currently supports 307 communities located in forty-nine states, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and the District of Columbia. Of this number, approximately one-third of the grants have been awarded to small towns or rural areas and twenty-five of the grants have been awarded to communities with predominately Native American and Native Alaskan populations. These latter groups particularly benefit from this support. As the results of the recent SAMHSA Household Survey (1999) show, alcohol and drug use is highest among American Indian populations when compared to all other population groups. We anticipate awarding approximately 145 additional grants during the FY 2001 grant cycle (September, 2001).

The maximum award is \$100,000 per fiscal year with each grantee required to match federal dollars with non-federal funds or in-kind support. Thus far, this program has leveraged over \$56 million in non-federal matching funds. After the initial award, grantees may reapply for additional funding in as many as four subsequent years, though in declining amounts after year two. The program encourages local communities to build sustainable, effective mechanisms to devise and carry out more powerful prevention strategies in future years, relying more heavily on local resources after the initial federal assistance.

Administration of the Program

Through an interagency agreement with ONDCP, the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) at the Department of Justice administers the program by processing grant applications, recommending awards, and monitoring the grants. The Center for Substance Abuse Prevention's (CSAP) six regional Centers for the Application of Prevention Technology provide technical assistance and training on topics related to science-based substance abuse prevention practices, evaluation, and coalition development. Because ONDCP does not have the grant management infrastructure necessary to manage all aspects of the program, the Drug Free Communities Administrator coordinates the work of these interagency partners to carry out these functions.

The Advisory Commission

Section 1041 of the DFCA established an eleven member "Advisory Commission on Drug-Free Communities" to: "advise, consult with, and make recommendations to the Director concerning matters related to the activities carried out under the Program." The Commission members have held seven meetings since their appointment in the fall of 1998 (November 1998, April 1999, July 1999, December 1999, March 2000, October 2000, and May 2001). Between meetings, Commission members provide advice and guidance through conference calls, e-mail, and individual telephone consultations with the Administrator and staff. The Advisory Commission has played an important role in the program's success.

Collaboration to support Drug Free Communities

The Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA) serves as one of our most valuable private sector partners. Their annual National Leadership Forum is the premier gathering of coalition leaders from hundreds of communities. The National Guard Bureau's Counter-Drug Office provides invaluable assistance to numerous coalitions on special projects and also devotes resources for drug prevention programming.

Reauthorization of the Drug-Free Communities Act of 1997

The President's budget requests \$50.6 million to expand the Drug-Free Communities Program in FY 2002, an increase of \$10.7 million over the FY 2001 enacted level. It also calls for the reauthorization of the Act.

On June 21, Congressman Portman and Levin introduced H.R. 2291 along with 18 cosponsors. I am pleased to support this reauthorization proposal and offer comments on behalf of ONDCP.

Of the total \$50.6 million, \$46.6 million will go directly to community anti-drug coalitions. We anticipate being able to award approximately 130 new grants in FY 2002, bringing the cumulative five-year total number of grants to approximately 600. HR 2291 would continue to ensure that communities' leverage these grant dollars by matching grant funds with non-Federal support, including both monetary and in-kind contributions.

Additionally, H.R. 2291 provides for additional support to community coalitions through improved training, technical assistance, and dissemination of best practices. It authorizes the creation of a National Community Coalition Institute that will develop and disseminate evaluation and testing mechanisms to assist coalitions in measuring and assessing their performance. The Institute will also provide education, training, and technical assistance for coalitions that is vital for the program's continued growth and success as the number of grantees increases.

H.R. 2291 would also provide for supplemental grants to experienced coalitions to mentor new coalitions and provide the benefit of their experience. Coalitions that meet stringent criteria for candidacy are eligible to apply and, if accepted, provide substantial support to the coalition they mentor.

Of the total \$50.6 million authorized in H.R. 2291 and requested in the President's budget, only \$4 million would be allocated for purposes other than providing grants directly to communities. These funds would be allocated to the following activities:

- Grants Administration that will provide support for OJJDP to ensure continuity in its grants management function through an Interagency Agreement with ONDCP.
- Training and Technical Assistance that will provide support for high-quality, low-cost training and technical assistance via each of the six regional Centers for the Application of Prevention Technology (CAPTs), managed by the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention (CSAP). This is an especially important function, considering the tremendous response ONDCP has received from coalitions in rural or other traditionally under-served areas, which do not have experience in applying for Federal grant funds. ONDCP will continue to utilize the resources of The Community Anti-Drug Coalitions of America (CADCA) to provide a wide array of technical assistance and program support to community coalitions.
- Evaluation, which has been supported by Congress, the DFC Advisory Commission, and ONDCP. An empirically sound evaluation is of paramount importance to maintain the integrity of this program. The Congressionally mandated Performance Measures of Effectiveness for ONDCP include specific objectives regarding community based antidrug coalitions.
- Program Administration that will provide support for the Program Administrator and the statutory Advisory Commission. The Program Administrator serves a critical function by ensuring a high level of responsiveness to the grantees and applicants, as well as enhancing interagency collaboration.

This level of administrative support, while a departure from the original plan of the Drug-Free Communities Act of 1997, reflects the experience of ONDCP, OJJDP and the Appropriations Subcommittees that provide funds for the program. While the initial authorization provided for a decreasing percentage for administrative costs each year, the requirements of grant-making law and the increasing number of grants awarded each year have required a higher resource commitment.

ONDCP conducted a comprehensive study of the administrative costs associated with the Drug-Free Communities Program and produced a report pursuant to Senate Appropriations Committee Report 106-500 (accompanying S. 2900), which was submitted to Congress for consideration on January 18, 2001. The report concluded that amending the administrative cost limitation to “not more than eight percent” per fiscal year would allow compliance with grant-making laws. It would provide thorough competitive peer review of all applications, enhance grantee access to valuable technical assistance about science-based prevention practices and training in those practices, improve ONDCP’s and OJJDP’s ability to manage the grant program through a comprehensive evaluation, and allow for greater promotion of the program to coalitions across the United States. Such an increase ensures that the grants awarded directly to community anti-drug coalitions will be used in the most effective manner possible.

Conclusion

We thank the committee for this opportunity to offer our support for this important legislation on behalf of the President. As you know, he has committed his administration to an all-out effort to reduce drug abuse. Community coalitions will be in the vanguard of this effort.