



LORAIN COUNTY SHERIFF'S OFFICE

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Ohio Senate Judiciary Committee
Testimony for S.B 138
October 13, 2017

The Lorain County Sheriff's Office operates a 422 bed Full Service Jail. The jail averages 8000 bookings per year, or about 22 people per day. The jail books every type of offender, from low level driving violators to hardcore felons who spend most of their adult life in and out of incarceration.

Each of these bookings represents an opportunity for someone to convey contraband into the facility. Drugs are the most commonly conveyed item, and until the opiate epidemic were less dangerous than weapons, which are also conveyed.

From 2011 to mid 2016 there were 258 incidents involving contraband found in the jail. 122 of those incidents involved finding the contraband, but not being able to associate it with a specific inmate. 118 times the contraband was found on the inmate and 18 times have been confirmed instances where the contraband was conveyed inside the inmate's body cavity. Some of the 258 instances involved intercepting the contraband during the pat down process conducted upon arrival, but the majority do not.

Of the items found during these instances tobacco, marijuana and lighting devices are most common, followed by crack cocaine, pills, heroin, crack pipes and syringes. And while you may think that this type of desperate act is only committed by hardened felons; it is not. In fact on many occasions drug related contraband has been conveyed by the most unlikely misdemeanor offenders.

In January of 2016 a 25 year old female who had been arrested for misdemeanor OVI was found to be in distress in the restroom of her jail dormitory. She had conveyed five Ativan pills in a plastic device within her vagina and could not retrieve them.

Also in January of 2016 a 36 year old female who was serving three days for petty theft was found to have been sharing some of the 15 Klonopin and Ambien pills she eventually admitted to conveying into the facility concealed in a plastic bag within her vagina.

In September 2014 a male inmate was sent to the hospital for emergency treatment due to bizarre behavior. It was discovered that he had eaten "spice laced marijuana" that had just been conveyed into the facility by a separate 28 year old male who had been arrested for contempt of court. Both were in medium security housing at the time. During investigation it was determined that the contraband was smuggled in wrapped in plastic concealed within the man's rectum.

These are three brief examples of drugs that were smuggled into our jail facility within body cavities. I reported it to you in this manner to highlight several important realities we deal with in today's jail environment. When items come in they are often shared with others, when items come in they are hard to detect, when items come in undetected, we generally don't find out about them until they are in use.

These three factors came into play in March of 2016 when a 38 year old male serving a 90 day jail sentence for misdemeanor theft, and who had only two weeks left to serve overdosed and died after snorting a fentanyl laced substance in a minimum security housing area. It is extremely unlikely that he brought the substance in with him. He had exhibited no previous signs of drug use since arrival. Another minimum security inmate is believed to have brought in the drugs and sold them to him in exchange for prepaid telephone access.

We've had multiple overdose events since that time, though fortunately no others have died. Lorain County is not unique; the events that I've described to you play out daily across the state. It is a difficult task to keep contraband out of the jail.

We need every tool available to keep the facility safe. Strip searches are a part of the line of security. Strip Search is an outdated term. It should be referred to as the visual contraband search of a nude inmate conducted by and officer of the same sex. The term Strip carries with it negative connotations and in this instance simply means without clothing.

At our facility all arrestees are given ample amounts of time to post bond before being processed into the facility. If a low level offender is arrested, they will have hours available to attempt to make bond. It does not make sense to

process that person into the facility only to have them post bond a short time later. No persons are rushed to be stripped searched.

There can be no lapse in security and inspection for contraband even in the case of a minimum security inmate. If he or she does not convey drugs or a weapon when they arrive, what if the person in the next bunk did?

The point I want to make most clearly today is that the safety and security needs of many Ohio Sheriff's Office Jails have moved past the time when restrictive strip searches sufficed to detect contraband. I want to tell anyone who will listen that today's arrestee population is no longer bound by commonly held societal taboo's and will effortlessly conceal drugs within their body cavities in order to feed their addiction or sell their product and jails have a low success rate of intercepting under those conditions. X-Ray body scanners increase the chances of detecting contraband, but they are not a guarantee. Stiffer penalties should be explored in conveyance cases.

For most jail budgets body scanners are not an option, the strip search method of detecting contraband and ensuring facility safety is still the primary tool and our Ohio guidelines on Strip Searches should be brought in line with Federal guidelines on the topic. And the distinction between Strip Searches and Body Cavity Searches must be clearly understood.

Respectfully Submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Andrew Laubenthal". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent loop at the end.

Andrew Laubenthal
Lorain County sheriff's Office
Jail Administrator