



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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America's Police Chiefs Say Drugs a Bigger Problem than Terrorism

Washington, DC: December 1, 2004—A majority of police chiefs in the U.S. regard drug abuse as the number one problem for law enforcement, and efforts to address the problem have been largely unsuccessful, according to a recent, national poll conducted by Peter D. Hart Research Associates. The survey, *Drugs and Crime Across America: Police Chiefs Speak Out*, was commissioned by Drug Strategies and the Police Foundation.

A strong majority of America's police chiefs view the drug problem facing their communities as having grown in the past decade, and believe that drugs are now a far more serious problem than property crime, violent crime, domestic violence, or even the threat of terrorism. Many chiefs, particularly those in small towns, report substantial increases in drug abuse in their communities since 1996, when the last poll was taken, and 74 percent of all chiefs say police resources are strained to the breaking point by the drug problem. At a time when concerns about terrorism are at the forefront of the national law enforcement agenda, fewer than 29 percent of chiefs surveyed say that the war on terror is taking away resources once used for drug enforcement.

Chiefs believe overwhelmingly that law enforcement has been unsuccessful in reducing the drug problem and 84 percent believe either that a fundamental overhaul or major changes are needed in the way we address the drug problem in the U.S. Respondents support a balanced approach to drug abuse and drug crime that combines law enforcement with public health, drug prevention, and treatment.

“Despite more than a decade of waging war on drugs and a nationwide arrest rate for drug offenses that exceeds any other category of crime, most of America's law enforcement leaders cite little progress in addressing a growing problem,” said Police Foundation President Hubert Williams.

Drug Strategies President, Mathea Falco, added, “Police chiefs view drug abuse as a complex issue that should be addressed as both a law enforcement and a public health problem. Indeed, the majority of chiefs expressed strong support for drug treatment programs for drug users.”

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The survey, conducted in June of this year, was a stratified sample of 300 U.S. police departments in small towns (fewer than 25,000 residents), medium communities (25,000 to 100,000 residents), and large cities (more than 100,000 residents).

This poll builds on a similar survey conducted in 1996 and provides important perspectives on how police chiefs' attitudes toward drug enforcement have changed in the intervening eight years.

The full report is available from Drug Strategies and the Police Foundation and is online at www.drugstrategies.org and www.policefoundation.org.

The Police Foundation is a national, nonpartisan, not-for-profit organization dedicated to supporting innovation and improvement in policing through its research, technical assistance, professional services, and communication programs. Established in 1970, the foundation has conducted seminal research in police behavior, policy, and procedure, and works to transfer to local agencies the best new information about practices for dealing effectively with a range of important police operational and administrative concerns. Motivating all of the foundation's efforts is the goal of efficient, humane policing that operates within the framework of democratic principles and the highest ideals of the nation.

Drug Strategies is a nonprofit research institute that promotes more effective approaches to the nation's drug problems and supports private and public efforts to reduce the demand for drugs through prevention, education, treatment, law enforcement, and community initiatives.

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