

CITY OF NORWICH
POLICE DEPARTMENT

REUBEN J. ROACH
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Good afternoon! I want to start by thanking this committee and specifically the representatives here who are willing to take the time to listen to those of us from smaller communities who are seeing first-hand, the consequences of the rising crime rate and how it is affecting main street America.

My name is Reuben Roach, and presently I am the Chief of Police for the City of Norwich Police Department in upstate New York. In this role, my duties include managing the resources allocated to me, as well as the twenty-one (21) full-time officers who wear the Norwich Police uniform.

In my twenty (20) year career as a police officer, I have worked in just about every subcategory of law enforcement from narcotics interdiction, as a Drug Recognition Expert (DRE), a child abuse and sex crimes forensic interviewer, a hostage negotiation team member, and many other facets. It has been a rewarding and fulfilling career.

In March of 2023, I was asked to be a representative on the board of Commerce Chenango, in the county where I live. Happily, I accepted this offer, and I was excited to build that relationship between the businesses and the police department. I quickly learned, however, that many of our businesses were suffering and that most of them were desperate for something to change.

The complaints I heard were mostly similar in nature; an influx of homelessness, loitering, open drug use in the business district, and unfortunately, but not uncommon amongst the complaints, was that people were defecating and urination in many of the business owners' doorways and parking areas. Commerce President Salvatore Testani summed it up when he said to me, "*The current homeless challenge has greatly increased the amount of loitering and open drug use in downtown Norwich and throughout the city. They are concerned because their customers and employees feel unsafe and it is having a significant impact on their livelihoods.*"

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In the ensuing months, forty (40) of our local business owners have formed a coalition in the City of Norwich, to lobby for tougher nuisance laws, and as many of our business owners have said, “something that has teeth and cleans up the area.” Our local common council, codes department, fire department and police department are working to help ease this burden for these businesses, but it is challenging to say the least.

I’m often asked, not just by business owners, but by my residents, about why the crime rate is rising, why people who are repeatedly getting arrested are not in jail, why drug houses are on nearly every street now, and why the overdose rate is as high as it is. While bail reform may not be the answer to every one of these questions, I can tell you from a twenty-year career in law enforcement, it is certainly a contributing factor.

When the Norwich Police Department executes a search warrant on a drug house, the individuals they arrest are back on the street within hours. These are drug houses, and drug dealers that I am talking about, not the drug user. These houses destroy neighborhoods and make them unsafe for people to raise families. Yet, these individuals are released back to the public, often with multiple class B felonies, the very same day they are arrested.

As I mentioned previously, citizens and business owners are concerned about witnessing individuals getting arrested repeatedly and not going to jail. Well, they aren’t wrong. Often, we arrest the same individuals five, six, seven times before they are even arraigned in court. Crimes like Loitering, Disorderly Conduct, Harassment 2nd, Trespassing, Criminal Possession of a Controlled Substance, Resisting Arrest, are just a few of the common crimes that we arrest for and release individuals within hours on.

Working closely with our District Attorney Michael Ferrarese, we have continued to fight this uphill battle, all while watching our small town deteriorate. DA Ferrarese also summed it up when he said to me, “*It is concerning to me as the District Attorney that we have businesses*

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being stolen from daily without any immediate consequences to the perpetrator. Bail should always be within the Judges discretion and not controlled by legislative roadblocks preventing us from being able to protect our communities.”

In closing, I would be remiss if I didn't mention that recruitment and retention in law enforcement is at the lowest that I've ever seen it. When I was hired as a Deputy Sheriff in 2003, I competed with over one-hundred individuals that were vying for three (3) openings. Right now, in 2024 the Norwich Police Department has the potential for three (3) openings, and we have a total of five (5) people on our list who are interested in attending the police academy. As a member of the New York State Chief's Association, I can tell you that recruitment and retention are on the mind of every Chief in New York.

Lastly, I want to thank each one of you for taking the time to listen to me, and to the others, and for helping to come up with solutions for the ever-increasing issue of crime on the rise.