



**Prepared Testimony of
Congressman Dennis Cardoza
Hearing on H.R. 1943, the "Stop AIDS in Prison Act of 2007" and
H.R. 1199, the "Drug Endangered Children Act of 2007"
Before the
Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security
Tuesday, May 22, 2007**

Thank you, Mr. Chairman for inviting me here today. You and your committee have accomplished a great deal for the American people in the short time since you have taken over as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security, and I admire your commitment to making our nation's communities safer.

I am here today to testify about an issue that is close to my heart: drug endangered children. Drug trafficking and abuse have had a harrowing effect on children across our country, contributing to domestic violence, abuse, and neglect. According to a recent Health and Human Services study, over 1.6 million children live in a home where at least one parent abuses illicit drugs, including cocaine, methamphetamine, heroin, and prescription drugs.¹

In my district in the Central Valley of California, I have seen the devastating impact of methamphetamine on children's lives. While visiting schools in my area, I have been told by teachers and administrators that a significant proportion of students have a parent or relative who abuses meth. I am positive that similar stories can be told in other parts of the country where drug abuse is rampant.

I am especially concerned about the impact drug abuse is having on the foster care system. Seven years ago, my wife Kathy and I adopted two foster children - Joey and Elena. It was truly an eye-opening experience for both of us, and I was inspired to become an advocate for improving the lives of foster kids. This year I introduced legislation to provide Medicaid coverage for foster kids with mental health problems who age out of the foster care program. Also, I am planning on introducing legislation to guarantee that every foster child has a Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) - a vital step to improving outcomes for children in foster care. Without a doubt, one of the most serious challenges facing the foster care system is parental drug abuse. In communities like mine across the country, drugs like methamphetamine are affecting innocent children and overburdening the foster care system.

Meth is extremely dangerous for children not only because meth addicts are more likely to abuse and abandon their children, but also because meth-addicted parents often set up meth labs in their homes. These labs are highly toxic and susceptible to fires and explosions and therefore place innocent children in physical danger. In my district, children have been found at labs with burns from spilled ingredients from the methamphetamine production process. In addition, there is a high risk of lasting health damage from toxic fume inhalation. Tragically, according to the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA), children are found at 20 percent of all meth lab seizures.²

Drug endangered children present unique challenges for law enforcement agencies, prosecutors, child protective services, social service agencies, health care providers, and other government entities. These children are often traumatized and abused, and they require special attention and care to transition into a safe and healthy residential environment. According to a survey released by the National Association of Counties, 69 percent of responding officials from county social service agencies indicate that their counties have had to provide specialized training for their welfare system workers and have had to develop special protocols for workers to address the special needs of children displaced by parental meth abuse.³

I recently introduced the Drug Endangered Children Act of 2007 (H.R. 1199) to address the challenges facing children abandoned, neglected, or abused by parents addicted to illicit drugs. The legislation would authorize the Department of Justice to make \$20 million in grants for drug endangered children for Fiscal Years 2008 and 2009. The grants are designed to improve coordination among law enforcement, prosecutors, children protection services, social service agencies, and health care providers to help transition drug endangered children into safe residential environments.

Grants to local law enforcement and other local government agencies are extremely effective in tackling public safety problems in communities across the country. The Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program has been critical in reducing crime across the country. The Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistant Grant program is another example of a program that empowers state and local governments to fight crime and respond to emerging public safety threats.

The Drug Endangered Children (DEC) program would operate in a similar manner to these highly successful Justice Department programs. By funding coordination across jurisdictions and among several different types of government agencies, the DEC program would foster cooperative efforts to address the needs of children affected by drug abuse. These grants would leverage the federal government's investment by offering an incentive for local government to invest their own money in confronting this important problem.

This legislation renews the authorization for the Drug Endangered Children program originally included as part of the USA PATRIOT Improvement and Reauthorization Act of 2005 (P.L. 109-177). Last June during the consideration of the Departments of Commerce and Justice, Science, and Related Agencies Act of 2006 (H.R. 5672), I offered an amendment to provide \$5 million for the program in Fiscal Year 2007. The amendment passed by voice vote, but the funding was not included in the Continuing Resolution adopted earlier this year.

The Drug Endangered Children Act of 2007 represents a continuation of the work of the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security this year. On February 6, 2007, the Subcommittee reported out the Native American Methamphetamine Enforcement and Treatment Act of 2007. A central provision of this legislation is to extend Drug Endangered Children grants to tribes and territories. This provision is irrelevant without the reauthorization of the DEC program itself. H.R. 1199 builds on the prior work of the Subcommittee to help Native American communities devastated by the methamphetamine epidemic.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman, for the opportunity to present my testimony to the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, and Homeland Security. I strongly believe that the Drug Endangered Children Act of 2007 would improve the lives of the more than 1.6 million children across the country impacted by parental drug abuse. I urge the Subcommittee to support this legislation.