EXHIBIT 5
DATE Feb. 10, 2005
HB 2; Dept. of Justice

MONTANA ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE

MACOP

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February 7, 2005

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Joint Sub Committee

Re: House Bill 2

Dear Committee Members,

On behalf of the Montana Association of Chiefs of Police (MACOP) and the Montana Sheriff's and Peace Officers Association (MSPOA), we are writing in support of the Attorney General's recommendation to receive funding to support the state drug task force, the addition of two lab technicians and a special drug prosecutor through House Bill 2.

MACOP is an organization that represents a wide cross section of municipal law enforcement administrators from across the state. MSPOA represents Sheriff's, Deputies and Correction Officers from a majority of Montana's fifty-six counties.

First let me say that drug interdiction is some of the most important work we do as law enforcement officers. Illicit drugs are interwoven into nearly every case we encounter as is evidenced by the number of bills before you this session regarding Methamphetamine. Illicit drugs are a common element in most domestic abuse, fraud, theft, embezzlement, burglary and assault investigations. They impact what we do perhaps more than any other individual factor.

One of the best tools we have available to support this effort is the regional drug task force. These task forces potentiate local drug interdiction resources. They are an essential tool in this large state in terms of making the best use of available resources. They make us far more effective and efficient in our drug investigation efforts.

For over twenty years these task forces have been funded through federal Byrne Grants. The money is allocated to the state in the form of block grants and is then distributed through the Montana Board of Crime Control. These funds have subsidized officers' salaries from the participating agencies and have enabled more agencies to participate in the task forces. The majority of these funds pay for drug investigators salaries.

This year those federal funds were cut in half by the federal government resulting in a net shortfall of over one million dollars to this state. That shortfall could spell the end of many regional task forces and significantly reduce our ability to impact the most important drug distribution and manufacturing cases. Without additional funding our ability to pursue the most significant drug cases will be compromised.

In addition the Montana State Crime Lab is the tip of the funnel for many investigations. As the only crime lab in the state they are asked to meet an ever increasing case load while maintaining strict control standards. The additional resources for the lab should be a priority for anyone interested in improving the health, safety and welfare of our citizens.

Lastly the need for a prosecutor who specializes in drugs cases is necessary to help many local jurisdictions cope with a clogged judicial system. Most local prosecutors have more cases than they can reasonably pursue. Many of the most complex and burdensome cases involve drug prosecutions and having the ability to pursue them through the Attorney General's Office provides additional support to those efforts.

We recognize what a difficult task you have in considering how to spend the limited funds this state has in such a way as to have the greatest impact on basic and necessary services. It is my belief that funding these requests has the best chance of having a positive impact on the lives of Montanans by providing the necessary resources to fight one of our state's greatest threats.

Thank you for putting the health, safety and welfare of Montanans first and for your consideration in this issue.

Sincerely,

Frank Garner
MACOP President

Jim Cashell
MSPOA President