

"Helping State and Local Law Enforcement During an Economic Downturn"

Senate Committee on the Judiciary

Thursday, January 8, 2009

Statement of U.S. Senator Russell D. Feingold

Mr. Chairman, thank you for chairing this important hearing.

I, too, am deeply concerned about the current state of federal funding for grants that aid state and local law enforcement agencies, in particular the Byrne Justice Assistance Grants and the COPS grants. The fiscal year 2008 funding levels were dangerously inadequate, and my state has suffered greatly as a result.

In my town hall meetings across Wisconsin last year, funding for these programs was the number one issue that I heard about from police officers, prosecutors and other law enforcement officials in the state. I have been a long time supporter of this funding, and fought hard against the particularly draconian cuts last fiscal year. A partnership between the federal government and state and local governments to provide adequate funding is especially important now when state and local agencies are being tasked with homeland security responsibilities in addition to their law enforcement responsibilities.

My initial reaction to including state and local law enforcement funds in the stimulus package is positive, particularly if it is done in a fiscally responsible way. It seems to me that this kind of spending is an effective way to both preserve jobs and protect communities from the damaging impact of the economic downturn. Failing to provide stimulus funds to the COPS and Byrne programs would make the difficult job of fighting crime even harder, which may well result in increases in crime, further harming the economy. Further, these grants create jobs, or at the very least ensure that more jobs are not cut. In these times of increasing unemployment and financial hardship, that aspect of these programs is especially important.

I want to thank the witnesses for being here today, and thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for holding the hearing.