

Statement of Senator Dianne Feinstein at the Judiciary Committee Hearing "Helping State and Local Law Enforcement During and Economic Downturn"

January 8, 2009

I thank Chairman Leahy for holding this hearing on an extremely important issue - keeping Americans safe from crime and ensuring adequate cooperation and funding for state and local law enforcement in the current economic downturn.

The need for additional funding for state and local law enforcement to protect our communities is clear. Over the last five years, our country has experienced an alarming increase in violent crime. In 2007, the Police Executive Research Forum reported that from 2004 to 2006, homicides increased overall by 10%, aggravated assaults with guns rose 10%, and robberies rose 12%.

This survey mirrors the FBI's own statistics, which showed that violent crime rose by 1.8 percent between 2003 to 2007. And this surge in the violent crime rate isn't just limited to big cities.

Cities with populations of 25,000 to 50,000 experienced the largest increase in violent crime, at 3.8%. In February 2008, in testimony before the House Judiciary Committee, Attorney General Mukasey acknowledged that violent crime was increasing in our communities.

Let me put these numbers in human terms. The International Association of Chiefs of Police equates the rise of 2.5% to 31,479 more victims of violent crimes in 2005. And the 3.7 increase for all of 2006 means about 47,000 more Americans were victims of murder, robbery, assault, rape, or other violent crimes.

Unfortunately, despite these disturbing numbers and the Justice Department's own acknowledgement that violent crime is increasing, over the last eight years the Bush Administration continually proposed drastic cuts in the federal assistance traditionally available to state and local law enforcement.

In FY2008, the Bush Administration proposed eliminating all 17 of State and Local Law Enforcement Assistance grant programs. In their place, the Administration proposed two consolidated block-grants. Unfortunately, its total budget for FY2008 was only \$582 million - 75% less than the FY2007 budget and over \$3 billion less than the total funding level for state and local law enforcement assistance in 2002.

Unbelievably, the President Bush's proposed FY2009 budget slashed funding for State and Local law enforcement even more. After repeatedly proposing to eliminate COPS hiring grants, President Bush zeroed out the entire COPS program for FY2009, replacing that important program with a mere \$4 million for a new community policing grant. In other words, President Bush's budgeted \$404 million for state and local law enforcement in FY2009 - this represents a 105% cut in these funds in just six years.

During the 1990s and earlier years in this decade, the federal government vigorously funded grant programs for state and local law enforcement. And we saw real results - violent crime went down year after year. It is no surprise that with the recent cuts, violent crime rates have ticked back up.

This trend has to stop, and I hope the incoming Obama Administration works quickly with Congress to provide appropriate funding and fix the huge damage that has been inflicted on state and local law enforcement in the last eight years.

We know what works and we can see the results of ignoring and underfunding proven programs. We also know that crime often rises in times of economic trouble. Now is not the time to continue the roll backs in state and law enforcement funding initiated by the Bush Administration.

Thankfully, Congress has already begun taking steps to correct the drastic and dangerous cuts to law enforcement funding made over the last eight years. Last year, Congress passed the Byrne/JAG Reauthorization Act, introduced by Senator Chambliss and me. This bill authorized funding for Byrne/JAG law enforcement grants at \$1.1 billion through 2013.

Additionally, today Senator Kohl and I introduced, along with Chairman Leahy and others, the COPS Improvement Act of 2009. This bill will serve the dual purpose of creating jobs in an economic downturn and fighting crime.

Specifically, the bill would authorize \$1.15 billion per year for the next six years to fund the following:

? Police Hiring Grants: The bill authorizes \$600 million per year to hire up to 50,000 officers to work in community policing efforts, and school resource officers to fight school violence. These funds will create jobs in a worsening economy, and can be used to retain officers, pay overtime costs, and reimburse officers for training costs.

? Law Enforcement Technology Grants: The bill authorizes \$350 million per year for police departments to obtain new technology and equipment to analyze real-time crime-data and incident reports to anticipate crime trends, map crime "hot-spots", examine DNA evidence, and purchasing badly needed technology upgrades for police on the street.

? Community Prosecutor Grants: The bill authorizes \$200 million per year to help local district attorneys hire and train more prosecutors.

? Troops-to-Cops Program: The bill authorizes a troops-to-cops program to encourage local police agencies to hire former military personnel who are honorably discharged from military service or who are displaced by base closings to allow them to continue working and engaging in public service.

The Byrne/JAG and COPS programs are time-tested programs that have proven their effectiveness over the course of more than 20 years. They are cornerstones in the state and local law enforcement efforts that have removed thousands of pounds of drugs and millions of dollars worth of drug proceeds from communities across the country.

Money from these programs provides law enforcement with the technology, weapons, and investigative tools they need to keep our communities safe. All we have to do is look at the rising rates of violent crime that correspond to the staggering funding cuts to understand how important these programs are for our country.

We must provide the necessary tools and funds to State and Local law enforcement and act decisively to combat the nation's growing gang problem and violent crime. Fully funding the Byrne/JAG and COPS programs and are steps in the right direction. Congress must act in these areas before our citizens are overrun with the onslaught of violent crime and gangs.

I thank Chairman Leahy for holding this hearing, and I hope it will assist Congress in moving forward with legislation to address these issues.