

Senate Committee on the Judiciary: "Helping State and Local Law Enforcement During an Economic Downturn"

Testimony of Charles H. Ramsey, Philadelphia Police Commissioner

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Good Morning Chairman Leahy, Ranking Member Specter and distinguished Committee members. Thank you for this opportunity to discuss the future of our nation's law enforcement agencies at such a critical time in our history. As the Police Commissioner for the City of Philadelphia, a member of the Major Cities Chiefs Association, and the former Chief of Police for the Metropolitan Police Department for nine years, I cannot overstate the importance of developing a sustainable relationship between the federal government and our state and local police agencies.

My testimony here today reflects not just the experience of the City of Philadelphia or the Philadelphia Police Department; our experience, especially at this time, is not unique. Federal support for municipal police organizations has been declining steadily since the horrific attacks of September 11, 2001, in favor of homeland security funding. From 2001 until now, local police have received 81% less financial support, from \$2.1 billion to \$400 million, for initiatives such as additional personnel hiring and technology grants.

I would submit, however, that this is not an either/or proposition. In looking forward, the federal government can and should support local police in both grants for crime reduction and homeland security. At its highest, the Philadelphia Police Department received almost \$32 million in federal grants for crime reduction in 1996. Last year in 2008, we received \$3.5 million in federal funding.

Not only do we as local law enforcement agencies share a similar history with decreasing federal investments, but we all share the present experience of being in an economic recession. No city or state has been spared from this recession. Local governments across the country are facing extraordinary budget shortfalls, necessitating cutbacks in services, programs, and personnel. The public safety sector is not immune, and the consequences for our cities, large and small, are very real. Local police agencies are the primary agency in any municipal government, for preventing, responding to, and reducing crime, violence and terrorism. A strong and economically viable city will have a strong, capable and well-trained local police agency as its foundation. With cities and states universally scaling back their police operations, infrastructure, reducing or cancelling academy classes, cutting back investigative and patrol overtime, slowing their financial investment in technology and implementing hiring freezes for sworn and civilian positions, all of us, police, local, state and federal government have a stake in ensuring that public safety for the citizens in this country is not compromised.

Providing federal support to local and state law enforcement agencies during this economic downturn is an investment in the growth and success of this nation's future. If we are to build a sustainable future for our cities and states, and that is one of the core issues here, sustainability, then the federal government must partner with local police departments in offering dependable and meaningful support. The public safety dividends reaped by reinvigorating local police with funds for additional personnel, advances in technology, enhanced training in emergency preparedness and homeland security, and the equipment necessary for intelligent policing, are innumerable. Safety and security are essential; essential for the American people and essential for a viable and effective government. Quite frankly,

we're not just discussing local policing today; we are discussing how the federal government can partner with municipal government in making it the strongest it can be.

Criminologists, social scientists and statisticians have rigorously studied policing in this country for over 40 years. One area that has received much inquiry is the positive impact of targeted policing initiatives through increased personnel in particularly crime-ridden areas. I've also been in this profession for over 40 years, and based on my experience, the most influential deterrent to crime is a highly visible and well-trained uniform patrol division.

More personnel not only deter those would-be criminals from breaking the law, but contribute a sense of safety and well-being to our law-abiding citizens that is intangible and invaluable.

In Philadelphia in particular, Mayor Michael A. Nutter and I set aggressive goals for the Department in January 2008, and worked diligently to reduce the level of violent crime in the city. Homicides in 2008 compared to 2007 decreased by 15%, shooting victims by 11%, and our homicide clearance rate reached 75%. This was accomplished by returning more officers from specialized units to uniform patrol in order to increase the size of our patrol force. In light of the current budget constraints, the Philadelphia Police Department will be unable to hire an additional 200 officers originally planned in the beginning of the 2009 fiscal year. "More police = less crime," a formula that when directed using evidence-based policing principles, such as targeting hot spots where violence is disproportionately high, is a crime fighting strategy with which I agree. Additionally, the Philadelphia Police Department must reduce our use of all overtime while maintaining our progress, and our presence on the street. Driving down crime in the years to come, not just for us, but for all local police, will present an even greater challenge in this economy.

The return on investment by the mere proactive presence of well-trained police on the street, coupled with the technological and human resources to investigate and analyze crime, is a very powerful and robust combination. This is exactly the area where local police agencies are being impacted operationally by the state of the economy. Not coincidentally, this is exactly the area where the federal government can step in, right now, with President-elect Obama's stimulus package, and help our nation's cities fortify our public safety programs.

Four areas, common to all law enforcement agencies, have emerged as the focal points for federal support for local police over the past ten years: 1) Hiring law enforcement personnel (both sworn positions and key civilian positions in forensics and intelligence) 2) Training and technology grants 3) Increasing homeland security funds for use locally, such as reinstating the Law Enforcement Terrorism Prevention Program (LETPP) and 4) Increasing flexible assistance through The Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (JAG).

The opportunities afforded to local police agencies via federal grants for personnel hiring through the COPS program are so vitally important to all of us now. It is not just sworn positions, however, that are needed for effective crime fighting. Increasing the number of civilian positions in the area of forensic sciences, specifically ballistics, DNA analysts and technicians, and intelligence and crime analysts also provides an essential complement to our local police agencies.

Bringing these civilian positions into police organizations permits a greater number of sworn officers to remain where they are needed most, in uniform patrol. In addition, the federal government could double its efforts in this area by providing an educational subsidy for persons interested in pursuing

college-level and advanced degrees in the study of forensic sciences and criminology in exchange for future service at a law enforcement agency. In such a way, the federal government would not only be contributing to improving the quality and professionalism of our local police agencies, but providing educational and public sector job opportunities at a time when America is suffering enormous workforce losses.

For the Justice Assistance Grants in particular, the issue of sustainability over its implementation period is also pertinent. Here, both the federal government and local and state police agencies could partner with each other more effectively with respect to information-sharing. The results of these grants, such as program and impact evaluations, if shared openly and collaboratively, could serve as an invaluable repository of both successful and unsuccessful crime reduction initiatives. Collaboration technology could be used to make the programs funded by JAG available for internet-based researching and sharing amongst police agencies across the country. Additionally, those programs that are well-implemented and have significant effects on reducing crime and violence could be used as models for other agencies, and more permanent funding could be sought.

Police hiring grants and law enforcement technology grants, totaling \$950 million, comprised the cornerstone of the "COPS Improvement Act of 2007," introduced by Senator Biden, with 35 cosponsors, including Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Leahy, and Ranking Member Specter in March 2007. Both the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the Major Cities Chiefs Association endorsed this important Act, which would have reauthorized and made critical improvements to the Department of Justice's community policing program. Within this Bill was an important procedural change that would have eliminated the \$75,000 cap for hiring officers. I believe it is important to highlight such a change because federal funds could have been used to support fully the hiring of officers over a sustained period of time, once again, speaking to the issue of sustainability. Although this Bill did not pass in the House of Representatives in 2007, the funding priorities still remain the same today, and would provide local police departments with the much-needed assistance required to continue fighting crime and violence successfully.

Lastly, in considering how the federal government can partner effectively with local and state police, we should not lose sight of one of the most potent weapons in our arsenal, that of prevention. Long-term and sustainable solutions to crime and violence must include prevention initiatives spanning from early intervention to re-entry. Groups such as the National Crime Prevention Council and Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, for example, work with police departments across the country to educate our youth and promote healthy and viable communities. Federal funding that provides intergovernmental cooperation and assistance between local law enforcement agencies and prevention organizations will go a long way toward making us all safer in our future.

When city and state governments have faced serious fiscal constraints historically, public safety operations have typically been one of the last sectors to be impacted. Government officials recognizing the importance of safety and security in their cities will cut back other programs and services prior to impacting police operations.

I believe it is a testament, therefore, of the severity of this financial crisis that police operations across the country are being adversely affected. Collectively, we cannot overlook this very simple fact. When we as a nation, have to compromise the safety of our citizens, it's time to re-examine our priorities at the national level. There is an opportunity here, despite the difficulty we face, and the federal government can assist us in building this partnership by reinstating funding that has proved invaluable in

our past. I look forward to continuing this very important dialogue with all of you, and will gladly accept questions. Thank you for this opportunity to appear before you today.