

Testimony of

# **The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.**

March 21, 2002

I called this hearing this afternoon to hear from mayors and from the men and women of local law enforcement and get their views of the COPS program specifically and the Administration's FY2003 budget request generally.

First, let me point out a few things.

Over the past eight years, direct federal spending on local police has funded the addition of close to 114,000 new officers on our streets.

Over the same time period, crime has dropped 28 percent.

The drop in the rate of victimization has been even more dramatic. From 1994, the year of the passage of the Crime Bill, to 2000, the rate of victimization for violent crimes (rape, robbery, assault, and homicide) has dropped 46 percent.

In 1994, we made a decision that the federal government ought to be in the business of encouraging local police departments to add force strength. We ought to help police departments get their officers out from behind their desks and out of their cars onto to streets.

Today, over seven years after the passage of the Crime Bill, COPS has awarded \$7.4 billion to hire 113,900 new officers. 83,000 of these officers are on the streets today. Eighty six percent of all law enforcement agencies now practice community policing. The number of community police officers increased by 400% from 1997 to 1999 alone.

Last December, this Subcommittee held a hearing to highlight a new study indicating that COPS grants have indeed reduced crime. These graphs make the point clear.

So where do we go from here? The Administration has put forward its vision. Big increases for first responders, increases which are needed and which I support. I have some concerns, however, about whether the panel assembled here will actually see the money, and I worried that FEMA may not be the right agency to fund these homeland security efforts.

But at the same time the Administration boosts spending for homeland defense, they make huge cuts in law enforcement programs. They cut in two areas, areas I want to highlight this afternoon.

Overall, the Administration has slashed funds to the men and women of law enforcement by about 36 percent from last year.

First, they want to end the COPS program. No dollars are included for hiring, no dollars are included for school resource officers, and the COPS technology program is cut by two thirds.

Enactment of this budget would mean we cannot put 4,500 new officers on the streets of America next year. We could not put 1,600 more resource officers into schools around the country. Eliminating a program which has been critically important in the crime drop would be penny wise and pound foolish. Frankly, I agree with the Attorney General when he says that "the COPS program has been a miraculous sort of success."

Second, they want to merge the Byrne and Local Law Enforcement Block Grant programs into one larger program. That sounds OK, until you learn that they then cut that new program's funds by 20% from last year. That will mean fewer crime prevention programs, fewer drug courts, fewer jail cells, and fewer treatment programs.

Mayors and police chiefs around the country are concerned by these proposals. They are facing budget squeezes at home, their resources have been stretched by new homeland security responsibilities, and the FBI has signaled that it may have to scale back its participation in local crime control efforts.

The Conference of Mayors and the League of Cities - made up of local elected officials from both parties - contacted me last month to voice their concerns. I scheduled this hearing today so the Senate could hear from them directly.

Let's have a discussion here today about programs that are important to mayors and chiefs. How has COPS been helpful to you? How does it fit into your new homeland security mission? What will its elimination mean for public safety in the future? How have the Byrne and Local Law Enforcement Block grants been effective? And most importantly, what do you need from us so that you can keep crime rates down and meet your new homeland security responsibilities?

I would invite all of you to read this report I am releasing today on the COPS program, and I thank you all for coming today. I'll now turn to Senator Grassley for any opening comments he may have.