

Testimony of

# **The Honorable Glenda Hood**

March 21, 2002

Chairman Biden and Members of the Subcommittee, the National League of Cities (NLC) is pleased to have this opportunity to share its position on homeland security and the imminent needs of our local law enforcement agencies. I am Glenda Hood, Mayor of Orlando, Florida, and Past President of the National League of Cities.

The National League of Cities is the nation's oldest national association representing municipal interests in Washington. NLC's membership includes more than 18,000 cities and towns across the country, with over 135,000 mayors and local elected officials.

At this time, I ask that my written testimony be submitted for the record with additional letters and statements from my colleagues throughout the nation who express strong bipartisan support for the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program and related programs that are extremely vital to local public safety needs for crime prevention, drug control, technology deployment, emergency communications, and new responsibilities for homeland security.

On behalf of NLC, I would like to express my gratitude to you, Mr. Chairman, for introducing S. 924, the PROTECTION ACT (Providing Reliable Officers, Technology, Education, Community Prosecutors, and Training In Our Neighborhoods Act) to reauthorize the Community Oriented Policing Services Program and expand its purpose to include special assistance for small cities with populations of 50,000 or less; more funding for retention of police officers hired through the Universal Hiring Program; community-based prosecution programs; and partnerships with schools and religiously-affiliated organizations. Your long-standing leadership on this issue clearly shows your commitment to ensuring that communities across the nation are safe and secure.

As you know, the COPS program, and other programs such as the Local Law Enforcement Block Grant, face significant changes in the Administration's fiscal year 2003 budget proposal. Cities need vital funding for local public safety needs. The National League of Cities believes it is imperative that Congress maintain level funding for these programs.

Since the COPS program was created in 1994, the nation has experienced a 28 percent reduction in crime. Similarly, the Local Law Enforcement Block grant has helped fund numerous successful crime prevention programs that serve specific local needs for youth, community organizations, public safety technology and overtime pay for police officers in certain situations such as September 11.

The Administration has proposed a First Responder Initiative to fund needs for local and state emergency preparedness capabilities against terrorism - such as planning, equipment, training and exercises. This proposal should also address critical needs for crime prevention.

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As NLC's current President, Mayor Karen Anderson of Minnetonka, Minnesota, has stated, "There's more to homeland security than protecting against a terrorist attack. We need to work together to strengthen our homeland defenses and assess other long-term needs that will strengthen our communities. Let's make sure we don't rob Peter to pay Paul in FY 2003 or beyond. Let's work together to find the right balance that takes into account the importance of investing in our cities and towns."

In this regard, NLC supports continued funding for community policing and the Local Law Enforcement Block Grant. These programs should not be eliminated, especially when cities and towns of all sizes are facing severe budget constraints because of the recession and unforeseen consequences of the September 11 terrorist attacks. To the extent the Local Law Enforcement Block Grant and Byrne Grant are consolidated, it is critical that as many dollars as possible are sent to the local levels with as much flexibility as possible. These programs directly impact both local hometown security and national homeland security priorities.

For example, the proposed changes in the COPS program would eliminate funding for hiring and retention of police officers, school resource officers, and targeted crime prevention grant programs for small communities.

In my City of Orlando, 103 police officers have been hired through the COPS program. The COPS technology program, Making Officer Redeployment Effective, has funded 86 mobile data terminals and 13 specialized laptops to increase efficiency and decrease response times. If overall COPS funding were reduced, I would be unable to put officers on the streets as quickly as our growth needs demand; and I may be put in the position to reduce other fundamental public services to continue the community policing and crime prevention initiatives that have fostered a significant decrease in crime. This is unacceptable to our cities, especially when a majority of local and state budgets are in a serious decline.

The City of Pembroke Pines, Florida, has used COPS funding for several initiatives to increase patrols around schools and businesses; expand bicycle patrols to increase community contact with officers; establish a Community Affairs Unit; and ensure more effective prosecution of cases through an enhanced records management system. Mayor Alex Fekete stated that these initiatives would not have been possible without the financial impetus provided by the COPS grant awards. Any reduction of the COPS Program in FY 2003 could curtail any further capabilities of the City to expand its community policing initiatives.

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The City of Wichita has hired 125 police officers through the COPS program, and has experienced more than a 22 percent decline in crime since 1994. Former NLC President and Mayor of Wichita, Bob Knight, stated that neighborhood associations and crime prevention partnerships have grown from only eight to more than eighty since 1995. "Community policing officers have played a significant role in bringing citizens together to identify safety and security issues. The result has been the development of neighborhood associations that can form partnerships with businesses, churches, non-profit agencies, governments, and educational institutions to identify solutions for positive change."

Winston Brooks, Superintendent of Wichita Public Schools, noted that students and staff benefit daily from school resource officers who provide law related educational programs, informal counseling, mentoring, tutoring, and assistance with school safety and crisis response planning.

The City of New Haven, Connecticut, has experienced significant declines in all Part I crimes since 1994. For example, homicides are down by 42 percent; robberies have decreased by 33 percent; and motor vehicle thefts have declined by more than 59 percent. NLC First Vice President and Mayor John DeStefano noted that the loss of dollars for both technology and other competitive grants would negatively impact the City's police department, preventing expanded partnerships with community groups and impeding the overall problem-solving capacity. The proposed changes in the COPS program would have a "negative effect on our crime statistics," Police Chief Melvin Wearing stated. "We have seen continued decreases since the program's inception, and we have been able to maintain the lower numbers."

The City of Hayward, California, has implemented several crime prevention initiatives through the COPS program including a successful Community Collaborative with neighborhood groups and other non-profit organizations. The Hayward Police Department also acquired 100 laptop computers, a new management information system, property and mapping modules, and a network connection to state and federal law enforcement networks through the technology components of the COPS program. "If funding were reduced or eliminated, progress could be slowed significantly, according to Councilmember Olden Henson. "Our ability to grow and adapt to the changing needs of our community would be negatively impacted without COPS-funded initiatives."

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The COPS program has been vital in preventing the proliferation of gang activity, and methamphetamines manufacturing and trafficking in the City of Watertown, South Dakota. "By hampering these two ills in our community, we have managed to prevent the collateral effects such as robbery, assault, and other crimes," said Mayor Brenda Barger. "Since we have hired the additional officers, we have enhanced crime prevention efforts by adding bike patrols, crime free multi-housing initiatives, a school resource officer, a very effective accident reduction program, and recruitment of community oriented officers through COPS training for supervisors.

"On a day-to-day basis, the officers have more time to interact and assimilate with the community they serve," Mayor Barger continued. "I feel that our policing style has contributed greatly to the quality of life in our community. The result of elimination would be obvious rather quickly. Programs would have to be cut. Crime would again begin to increase. Quality of life in the community would decline."

Mr. Chairman, these examples represent the thousands of successful crime prevention initiatives funded by the COPS program. The country -- especially now -- needs community policing. The best way to ensure domestic safety is through the continued community partnerships, problem solving, and enhanced communication that COPS has facilitated since 1994. Full funding for COPS and other public safety programs must continue to be a cornerstone in effective law enforcement over the next several years as we face the domestic challenges ahead.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I greatly appreciate your leadership on this issue, and look forward to working with you and the House and Senate Appropriations Committees as the fiscal year 2003 budget process moves forward to ensure full funding for local public safety programs. I would be happy to answer any questions that the Subcommittee may have at the appropriate time.

Thank you.