

Testimony of  
**Mr. Michael J. Szczerba**

March 21, 2002

Good afternoon Senators and Chairman Biden. I would like to thank you, Chairman Biden, for inviting me here to speak today on this very important issue. My name is Chief Michael J. Szczerba, Chief of the Wilmington Department of Police in the State of Delaware.

Accompanying me is my Deputy Chief, Inspector James Wright. The Department of Police has an authorized strength of 289 sworn Officers, tasked with policing a city of 14 square miles, and a residential population of 75,000 people, with that number doubling during business hours. In 1996, the City of Wilmington experienced one of its worst economic downturn in recent times. The crisis affected every aspect of the City's budget, including that of the Police Department. Through retirement incentives and attrition, the Department of Police reached an all time low of staffing, with numbers plummeting to 221 sworn Officers. Along with this decrease in manpower, the City experienced the most catastrophic increase in gun violence to date. 1996 saw a record number 108 shootings and 21 homicides in a city that prior to that year never saw more than 40 shootings and 12 homicides annually. Our city was under such siege, and staffing was so low that neighboring Police Agencies offered their personnel and resources to help Wilmington combat this growing epidemic.

Through the Biden Crime Law, the Department of Police was able to hire 28 Officers through the use of federal funds. These federal funds replaced resources that our city just did not have. But assistance from the Biden Crime Law, as we affectionately call it in Delaware, did not end there. On October 3, 1997, Senator Biden, then Wilmington Mayor James H. Sills, Jr., and then Police Chief Michael Boykin announced a comprehensive crime-fighting plan, dubbed "Operation Quiet Storm," which was based on strategies employed in other large cities nationally that had reduced crime rates significantly. "Operation Quiet Storm" was designed to storm five identified crime hot spots with local law enforcement resources working in concert with federal law enforcement agencies to attack the problems of gangs, guns and drugs. With numbers now back to its authorized strength, the Wilmington Department of Police acted as the lead agency in this joint effort, resulting in cutting the amount of shootings in half, and decreasing homicides by 40%.

This is just one but important example of the impact that the Biden Crime Law has had on local law enforcement agencies. Speaking specifically for the City of Wilmington, the funds procured through the Local Law Enforcement Block Grant provided by the Biden Crime Law has allowed the Wilmington Department of Police to increase its services to the citizens of the City of Wilmington by increasing current programs and reinstituting programs that had been cut due to budget restraints. As a result, we were able to expand our K-9 Unit from 6 Officers to 10 Officers. Our Crime Prevention Unit, which instills Community Oriented Policing, suffered from budget cuts yet remained a constant request of residents, was refunded and is now providing an invaluable service to help people take proactive steps to protect themselves. We have increased our computer systems and our forensic technology, including the purchasing of the IBIS system, or "Ceasefire". Wilmington is one of only about 20 sites in 12 states throughout the country to have this sophisticated, computerized, digitized weapon and bullet identification system. This

system is designed to cease the escalating and alarming number of gun-related crimes and homicides in Wilmington and other cities throughout this country, and it has had a positive impact on investigative techniques. One of the best aspects of the Local Law Enforcement Block Grant is it allowing the Department of Police to institute Anti-Drug Patrols in areas that had been torn apart by the scourge of drugs.

As the climate in this country has changed, attention must be placed on Homeland Security. However, Homeland Security has a two-pronged definition. The first being the most obvious...taking measures to ensure that the tragedies that affected this country never occur again. The second is providing the security of those who live day to day in our cities and communities. The onus of that security falls on those of us in local law enforcement. The Biden Crime Law has made it possible for us to allow the quality of life in all of our cities and communities to increase as national crime trends have decreased. In these hard times where some communities, like the City of Wilmington, are reaching economic hardships, that Homeland Security which comes in the form of our frontline Police Officers, relies in part, on the resources provided by the Cops Office. I fear that if these resources are restricted, history will repeat itself. I fear that Police manpower will decrease, allowing gun violence to increase and the terrorists that take the form of drug dealers will flourish. If this occurs, the quality of life of our communities, the real infrastructure of this country, will decrease exponentially, undoing all the good that the Biden Crime Law has done as well the hard work of the Police Officers in this country.