

Testimony of

The Honorable Patrick Henry Hays

March 21, 2002

Good afternoon. I am Patrick Hays, Mayor of North Little Rock, Arkansas. I have served as Mayor for over 13 years, starting in January of 1989. I am here today on behalf of The U.S. Conference of Mayors, for which I serve as a Trustee and member of the Executive Committee.

I want to thank Chairman Biden for calling today's hearing, as well as Senator Grassley and the entire Subcommittee.

Mayors have consistently attached a high priority to preparing our cities for the possibility of disasters - both natural and man made.

Now, in the wake of September 11 and the anthrax mailings, emergency management planning has been redoubled, and there have been significant new deployments of public safety resources.

The Conference of Mayors released a survey which found that from September 11, 2001 through the end of 2002, cities will spend an additional \$2.6 billion on new homeland security priorities including equipment, overtime and training.

Mayors know the importance of public safety and are 100 percent committed to the homeland war against terrorism. But we must forge a new federal-local partnership to make sure that our domestic soldiers - police, fire, emergency workers and other city employees - have the resources needed for this new challenge.

This was the message mayors and police chiefs carried to Congress last week, and I want to thank Chairman Biden for participating in our discussions.

In October of 2001 the Conference of Mayors sponsored a Safety and Security Summit at which we developed a National Action Plan covering transportation security, emergency management, and law enforcement.

I ask that our plan be entered into the record, and would like to touch on several key points related to law enforcement.

Supporting our First Responders

First, at a January 24 White House meeting with 300 mayors President Bush announced his \$3.5 billion first responders initiative, which we praised as an important step forward. As we stated then, we want to work directly with Congress to refine that proposal and make sure that those dollars are provided in the most efficient and effective manner.

To that end, it is our belief that funding must be provided directly to city and county first responders, rather than all flowing through the states as proposed by the Administration.

After all, a 9-1-1 call does not get a state trooper.

Second, we must ensure that the funding can be used to not only prepare for a possible attack, but to also help prevent future attacks. Our police departments must have access to the funding, and officer deployments such as overtime should be specifically authorized.

For example, mayors called for and support the more detailed terrorism alert system unveiled by Governor Ridge, but these alerts will continue to require more officers on the streets -- in essence national security being provided by local law enforcement.

This is why the Conference of Mayors strongly supports legislation being sponsored by Senator Clinton and several other Senators to create a highly flexible Homeland Security Block Grant.

The Ongoing Fight Against Crime

Let me address specifically the kind of local choices mayors face.

Last year the Public Housing Drug Elimination Program, run through HUD, was eliminated. My city received \$188,000 from our housing authority under this grant to operate three precinct stations located in our housing projects. All three now face elimination.

This reduction, along with homeland security requirements, will make me choose between protecting my citizens against a terrorist who may attack my community, and those terrorists or criminals which strike my city every day.

The worst terrorist to most of America is the one who lives next door, and who through fear of daily crime keeps you from living your life.

Public safety is achieved by a balancing of resources to needs, and every community is different.

That is why as we wage the new war against terrorism, we must not retreat from the ongoing fight against crime.

In the 1990's, mayors worked closely with our police chiefs and officers to increase public safety -- with dramatic results. As of last year, violent crime was estimated to be at a 20-year low nationwide.

Mayors strongly believe that major factors in this crime reduction were additional officers on the streets, the deployment of new technology, and a new focus on community policing -- all of which were greatly assisted by the COPS program and Local Law Enforcement Block Grant (LLEBG).

Just last week the Conference of Mayors sponsored an event in Baltimore which highlighted a 24 percent crime reduction in that city over the past two years. Baltimore Mayor O'Malley is

emphatic that this would not have been possible without the help of these federal resources, and you would find similar stories in cities large and small across the nation.

But while there have been major reductions, crime is still a major issue in many cities, and in many neighborhoods within cities.

In addition, we know that key indicators, such as the economy and return of more than 600,000 ex-convicts annually to our cities, have led some experts to predict an upswing in crime rates.

Many cities want to hire additional officers, move existing officers onto the streets, and place new officers in schools. In addition, there is a major interest in new crime fighting technologies.

That is why we find it counterintuitive that OMB is proposing to cut COPS by 80 percent and eliminate the block grant by merging it into the state Byrne Grant program. This comes on top of a 25 percent reduction in the local block grant last year.

We must ensure that cities have the resources needed to fight both the domestic war on terrorism and the continuing war against crime. We simply cannot "Rob Peter to Pay Paul."

I want to thank Chairmen Biden for sponsoring bi-partisan legislation (S. 924) to reauthorize the COPS program, and urge this Subcommittee to help us ensure that both COPS and the Local Law Enforcement Block Grant are funded this year.

Federal-Local Law Enforcement Cooperation

Finally, we need a new communications system between federal and local public safety officials with a "24/7" threat assessment capability and appropriate sharing of intelligence.

Our discussions with the Administration on this have been constructive, but we want to ensure that any institutional barriers to greater intelligence sharing by the federal government are addressed.

That is why we urge passage of the "Federal-Local Information Sharing Partnership Act" (S. 1615) which would allow the federal government to increase intelligence sharing with local and state governments.

Conclusion

I want to thank the Subcommittee for this opportunity to testify, and I look forward to continued discussions as together we work to strengthen our nation's homeland defense.