

Testimony of

# **The Honorable Christopher Christie**

UNITED STATES ATTORNEY  
DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY  
September 17, 2003

STATEMENT

OF

CHRISTOPHER J. CHRISTIE  
UNITED STATES ATTORNEY  
DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY

BEFORE THE

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY  
UNITED STATES SENATE

CONCERNING

COMBATING GANG VIOLENCE

PRESENTED ON

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STATEMENT OF UNITED STATES ATTORNEY CHRISTOPHER J. CHRISTIE  
District of New Jersey  
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Concerning

Combating Gang Violence

Chairman Hatch, Senator Leahy, distinguished members of the Committee, I am Christopher Christie, the United States Attorney for the District of New Jersey. It is an honor to have the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the subject of criminal street gangs and violent drug organizations in the District of New Jersey.

1. Gang Structure and Gang Violence

In May of 2002, in response to steadily escalating gang violence in my District, I created a Violent Crime Unit to specifically target street gangs, violent narcotics enterprises and firearms trafficking networks. The Violent Crime Unit, which is staffed by ten experienced Assistant United States Attorneys, operates on the premise that the gangs of today constitute organized crime and must be prosecuted in the same manner and with the same statutes that have been used against more traditional organized crime in the past. Today's gangs are structured and sophisticated criminal operations; they tend to have a clear hierarchy in the making of decisions and in the distribution of criminal proceeds. Moreover, they have considerable life-spans. Unfortunately, it has not been unusual for a gang or drug enterprise to control a certain neighborhood or area for ten years or more. Indeed, today's gangs operate like businesses-albeit businesses unrestricted by any sense of right and wrong. They create and exploit a market, typically the narcotic drug market, they maintain and expand their territory, they recruit members to replace the ones they lose to violence or incarceration, and they are set up to withstand local prosecutions.

The structure of the typical gang or narcotics organization insulates the gang's hierarchy from the types of prosecutions typically brought by local authorities. Lacking the resources to commence global prosecutions, local law enforcement entities generally conduct "buy and bust" operations which result in the arrests of the lowest level of the gang's personnel. Gang leaders intentionally keep the "hand-to-hand sellers," "look-outs" and "steerers," who are typically arrested in such operations, unaware of information that could compromise the success of the organization. Additionally, gangs intentionally use their most fungible members - children and drug addicts - to fill these positions, which are highly vulnerable to prosecution. Thus, local authorities may be unable to build a case against the gang's leadership, and even a local "sweep" arrest of ten or fifteen street-level sellers may not affect the gang's ability to function. Also, gang related murders and attempted murders present particular problems for local law enforcement. First, witnesses may be hesitant to testify against gang members for fear that local law enforcement is unable to ensure the witnesses' safety. Second, gang murders are most often witnessed solely by accomplices. These accomplices obviously will not testify unless they are compelled by the prospect of being a defendant in a criminal case carrying a substantial prison term. Unlike the federal narcotics sentencing guidelines, sentences under New Jersey drug laws, for instance, rarely compel an accomplice to testify against his gang confederates. Additionally, a gang defendant is more likely to be detained following his arrest on federal charges than on state charges.

The structure and diversification of criminal activities of today's gangs require an aggressive and comprehensive federal approach. It is not uncommon for a single gang to be involved in drug dealing, firearms trafficking, murder, robbery, money laundering and, more recently, mortgage fraud. Therefore, a team led by the U.S. Attorney's Office and consisting of other federal agencies, such as the FBI, DEA, ATF, Main Justice and the Marshal's Service, along with local authorities, such as the county prosecutor, sheriff and police, must be assembled, and information shared that may demonstrate broader criminal operations.

For the third straight year, the murder rate in Newark, New Jersey's largest city, has risen, as has the number of handguns recovered by police officers. The rise in violence and unlawful gun possession corresponds directly to a substantial increase in documented gang activity beginning in 1999.

2. Investigation and Prosecution of Gang Members

Our office, using Project Safe Neighborhoods as our catalyst, has worked closely with the Prosecutor's

Offices of the District's twenty-one counties, local police officials and our Project Safe Neighborhood research partner, Rutgers University, to identify areas of concentrated gang activity. Because federal resources should be reserved for those highly structured, large-scale, violent criminal enterprises, federal prosecutors exercise careful discretion in focusing their limited resources on the worst gangs. For instance, while a small crew of drug dealers in a certain location may be a pressing concern of local law enforcement, that activity would not be an appropriate target of an organized federal prosecution, or a coordinated state/federal investigation. However, our office routinely shares witnesses and information, generated from comprehensive gang investigations, with local prosecutor's offices to assist them with pending state homicides and other serious violent crimes. Similarly, our office has attempted to coordinate major gang prosecutions with local county officials.

In the District of New Jersey today, we have a wide variety of gangs and violent drug organizations. We have both national gangs and local drug organizations, which tend to identify with the street or neighborhood they come from. Currently, my office is prosecuting several gang and drug enterprise cases that are typical of the types of criminal organizations operating today in New Jersey. We have successfully prosecuted, or are currently prosecuting, members of the following gangs: (1) Van Nostrand Soldiers Out Politicking (VSOP), Jersey City, N.J.; (2) Lex Mob, Jersey City, N.J.; (3) Elvis Irizarry Crew, Jersey City, N.J.; (4) Grape Street/Rolling 60s Crips, Irvington, N.J.; (5) Double "ii" Bloods, East Orange, N.J.; (6) James Bond Gang, multiple New Jersey and New York counties; (7) Gangster Killer Bloods set of the Bloods, East Orange, N.J.; (8) Latin Kings, multiple counties in New Jersey; (9) Fukkianese Armed Robbery Crew, multiple counties in New Jersey. It is important to note that some of the gangs I just mentioned operate not only in New Jersey's cities, but in its affluent suburbs, as well. Indeed, the gang problem is spreading to every corner of New Jersey.

Although my office is investigating and prosecuting a large number of gang cases, I would like to discuss a few in more detail.

#### LEX MOB

My office is prosecuting 28 members of a violent Jersey City narcotics distribution organization called Lex Mob. Lex Mob is the prototypical large-scale, successful narcotics business found in many urban areas across the country. In 1992, the group took over a neighborhood in Jersey City by killing the previously-existing dealers. Over the next ten years, it increased its territory, again by intimidating or killing its rivals. At any given time, the organization employed between 20 to 30 street sellers. The number of active sellers doubled in the mid-afternoon to sell cocaine to the teenage children walking home from school. The enterprise was highly structured. The street sellers answered to one of between five and ten Lieutenants, who provided the sellers with bags of one hundred vials of packaged cocaine, and who collected the proceeds from the sellers throughout the day. The perimeter of Lex Mob's territory was guarded by sentinels on the roof-tops and the streets, who communicated with each other and with the sellers by means of walkie-talkies.

One cooperator estimated that the organization was taking in close to one million dollars per week in cocaine sales. Much of this drug money was laundered and used to purchase expensive cars and houses, as well as to bail out arrested gang members. In one state murder case, the bail for eight Lex Mob members, which totaled four million dollars, was paid in a matter of days. It is worth noting that each of the twenty-eight Lex Mob members charged federally were detained pending trial.

Lex Mob protected its business with force. If rival sellers dared to sell cocaine in its territory, Lex Mob hit men shot them.

#### Van Nostrand Soldiers Out Politicking

My office has recently convicted the leaders and members of a highly successful commercial armed robbery crew called Van Nostrand Soldiers Out Politicking, or VSOP. Hailing from Van Nostrand Avenue in Jersey City, members of this prolific criminal group committed five armed bank robberies, and over twenty armed commercial robberies of check-cashing establishments, restaurants, drug stores and other businesses in northern New Jersey between 1996 and 2001.

An active VSOP member became an informant and made consensual tape recordings of his fellow gang members over a two month period. My office, in conjunction with the FBI, convicted eight VSOP members of serious federal crimes, including RICO, Murder, Hobbs Act Robbery, Bank Robbery and Use of a Firearm During and In Relation to Violent Crimes. The greatest challenge in the case was to develop the evidence necessary to show that VSOP was a criminal enterprise, with a sufficient leadership structure, to allow use of the RICO statutes. Unlike large-scale narcotics enterprises, such as Lex Mob, armed robbery

crews tend to be smaller and less structured. This makes it difficult, though not impossible, to prosecute groups of this type under the RICO statutes. When use of RICO is appropriate, we coordinate its use with Main Justice, and use it as an effective tool against these criminal enterprises.

#### Double "II" Bloods

The Double "II" Bloods are a particularly ruthless Bloods set from East Orange, New Jersey. Named for both their beginnings in Inglewood California and their home in East Orange, or what they call Illtown, New Jersey, the Double IIs are a prime example of how a disparate group of street thugs can fashion themselves into an organized criminal enterprise through a strict set of rules and brutal discipline. Using the resources given to us under Project Safe Neighborhoods, we worked with our PSN research partner, Rutgers University, to identify and target the Double II Bloods as the largest and most violent street gang in New Jersey. Our office has charged seven members and associates of this gang with drug conspiracy and using firearms in furtherance of drug trafficking.

The hierarchy of the Double II Bloods is as follows:

101- Superior - The 101 calls the meetings and gives the orders to do acts of violence. He also runs the every day activities of the gang

102- Second in Command or Two Star General: if anything happens to the 101 - can call meetings and give orders to do acts of violence

103- Minister of Defense - The 103 is in charge of getting guns, carrying out discipline, and conveying orders of violence from 101 or 102 to the gang.

104 - Minister of Information: The 104 is in charge of making sure everyone has and knows the gang's history, codes, and rules. He is also charged with knowing what acts of violence have been carried out, what threats have been made against the gang and what vendettas against the gang may be looming.

105 - Five Star General - The 105 is on par with the 101 and 102 and can call meetings and give orders to do acts of violence. This status position is an honorary one; the 105 does not run the every day activities of gang.

106 - Lieutenant - foot soldiers, follow orders

107 - Second Lieutenant - foot soldiers, follow orders

108 - Little Homie - foot soldiers, follow orders

109 - Little Homie - foot soldiers, follow orders

Meetings must be attended by all members. During the meetings, each member contributes \$31 into a fund that is used to bail out Double IIs who have been arrested and to purchase guns for the gang's use and protection. All members are charged with knowing the rules and code of conduct, which are set forth in written form and are to be committed to memory.

Member initiations also occur during the weekly meeting. Members "come home" or join the Double IIs in one of several ways. Most common is for a member to get his or her "31" and to be "jumped in." This consists of the individual being beaten by a group of Double IIs for 31 seconds, and sometimes for several repeated sessions of 31 seconds. You may ask why the number 31? We have learned that this is because there are 31 rules in the Bloods Code of Conduct and that Rule number 31 is "I will have love for my Bloods." The payment of the \$31 is a sign of that love. The beating for 31 seconds is to reinforce the discipline of the 31 rules in the Code of Conduct.

Issues are voted on and disputes are discussed and resolved during meetings. The leadership may give an order that some act of violence be carried out against rival gang members in retaliation for disputes, which are often prompted by the gang's drug trafficking. Orders to discipline gang members are also given out during the meetings. If a member of the gang is suspected of cooperating with law enforcement, he or she is labeled "food," which authorizes the use of force against the member. As recently as this month, one member suspected of cooperating was brutally slashed in the face with a razor in a prison commons area. The lifeline of the Double II Bloods is heroin trafficking. The members of the gang sell the same brands, which insures the "quality" of the heroin. At one point, the number of Double IIs involved in heroin sales became so numerous that they instituted "shift work," which ensured that certain members sold heroin only at certain times and that too many dealers were not out on the block at one time. The rich heroin demand in East Orange made it possible for many members to make thousands of dollars per week on a few square blocks.

In addition to trafficking narcotics, members of the Double II Bloods are also involved in firearms trafficking. As federal agents discovered, the Double II Bloods were purchasing guns en masse from an out of state intermediary, who used straw purchasers to buy large quantities of guns from one particular gun store in another state. The interstate nature of the gun trade, especially into a state like New Jersey, cannot

be understated. Our office is working closely with ATF to develop investigations that go after these out-of-state gun dealers who are a pipeline of weapons into New Jersey through gangs like the Bloods. Until federal agents intervened in this case and cut off the gun supply, the gang had sought to begin supplying other neighboring Blood sets with firearms.

The Double IIs are highly structured, methodically disciplined and extremely violent. Our investigation of them attributes numerous shootings and countless other acts of violence to this violent organization.

Comprehensive federal prosecution of street gangs is a necessity. It is one of the top local priorities I identified when I took office in January of 2002. It is, in my opinion, the new organized crime in the United States, an organized crime that destroys families, corrupts our children and lays waste to neighborhoods in our most vulnerable communities. We must mount a fight comparable to the fight against La Cosa Nostra in past decades if we expect to have the same success. We in New Jersey are engaging in the initial battle of this war against gang violence, and we hope our victories will lead to more successes.

I thank you for this opportunity to discuss this important issue and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have of me.