

Statement of

# **The Honorable Patrick Leahy**

United States Senator  
Vermont  
June 5, 2007

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Chairman, Judiciary Committee

"Examining the Federal Role to Work with Communities to Prevent and Respond to Gang Violence: The Gang Abatement and Prevention Act of 2007"  
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The importance of today's Committee hearing is underscored by the recent news that violent crime in America is again on the rise. This troubling news is the result of the Bush Administration's failure to heed the lessons learned from our successful fight against violent crime in the 1990s. Congress and the Clinton Administration in the 1990s provided significant new funding to strengthen state and local law enforcement, as well as supporting programs to prevent gang and youth violence, and our joint efforts worked.

Studies have repeatedly shown that, largely due to these initiatives, violent crime and gang offenses steadily dropped to historic lows. But the Bush Administration chose a different course, and, despite warnings from me and others, has repeatedly cut funding for state and local cops on the beat and community programs targeting the prevention of youth crime. I hope that with today's hearing and new legislative proposals, we can begin to reverse the mistakes of this Administration and place this country back on the right track to reducing violent crime.

I know the witnesses today agree with me about the importance of our state and local law enforcement, who work every day to keep our streets safer, and about the need for more efforts to prevent juvenile and gang crime. I share the views of Los Angeles Police Chief William J. Bratton, who is one of our witnesses today, that "we can't arrest our way out of our gang crime problem." As those who have worked on this issue for years know all too well, we must match our commitment to law enforcement with an equal commitment to intervention and prevention as a means of curbing gang violence. Neither strategy works without the other, and I believe, as so many law enforcement and civil leaders do, that any legislative proposals to address gang violence must focus on new means to prevent youth and gang violence.

The gang problems of today are not the same crime problems that we have faced historically. The gangs today are less centralized and younger than ever before, and the violence from these groups is less affected by traditional law enforcement techniques. Local police forces and community groups from across the country have responded in new ways to this problem, and their efforts and successes in creating programs to provide alternatives and options for youth who are at risk for gang violence must be encouraged and applauded.

I want to thank Senator Feinstein for her continued hard work on this important issue, and for her commitment to restoring the resources necessary for state and local law enforcement, along with community and civic groups, to combat gang violence.

The Gang Abatement and Prevention Act of 2007 is an improvement over earlier gang legislation. It does not contain the death penalties, mandatory minimums, and expansive juvenile transfer provisions that were among my strongest objections to some of the past proposals. I am hopeful that, with additional changes, it could provide some of the resources necessary to reverse the policies of this Administration which have neglected the officers who combat gang violence on a daily basis and the organizations that work to keep children out of gangs. I particularly support provisions in the bill to provide up to \$1 billion over 10 years to support collaborative law enforcement and community prevention efforts, with at least half of that amount going to civic groups for innovative prevention programs that truly work to reduce gang violence.

I am concerned, though, that certain provisions in the current version of the bill may work against these valuable efforts by creating mandatory sentencing schemes and federalizing many petty crimes that do not attack the core problem and only direct our federal law enforcement efforts away from the most serious offenders. I do not believe that sweeping new federal crimes, which federalize the kind of street crime that states have traditionally addressed and can address well with the adequate resources, are the right way to go. I thank Senator Feinstein for working with me toward addressing many of these concerns, and I hope that she and the other sponsors of this bill will continue to work with me to find common ground and come up with legislation that all can support without reservation.

We all care deeply about eradicating gang violence, and we must work together to create a comprehensive solution to this troubling, persistent problem. I am dismayed that the Bush Administration has turned away from the tried and proven methods used to reduce gang crime and other violent crime so effectively. I will work tirelessly to reverse their mistakes and reinvigorate our efforts to provide federal support for those who combat gang violence every day and to protect those who are its victims.

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