

Testimony of
Patrick Word

June 5, 2007

Testimony of Detective Patrick Word
Gaithersburg (MD) Police Department
Representing the
National Alliance of Gang Investigators Associations
(NAGIA)
The Gang Abatement and Prevention Act of 2007 Before the Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy, Chairman
The Honorable Arlen Specter, Ranking Member
June 5, 2007
Highlights of Testimony

? The pervasiveness of gangs throughout society is undeniable. They incite fear and violence within our communities. Gangs threaten our schools, our children and our homes. Gangs today are more sophisticated and flagrant in their use of violence and intimidation tactics. As they migrate across the country, they bring with them drugs, weapons, violence and other criminal activity. Acknowledgement of the issue and joint community and law enforcement responses is our best defense.

? The National Alliance of Gang Investigators Associations (NAGIA) is an alliance of eighteen (18) gang investigator associations across the United States and Canada. The combined alliance represents over 20,000 gang investigators, intelligence officers, gang prosecutors, corrections officers, and parole and probation agents at the federal, state, local and tribal levels. The NAGIA is a unique alliance of criminal justice professionals dedicated to the promotion and coordination of national anti-gang strategies. The NAGIA also advocates the standardization of anti-gang training, establishment of uniform gang definitions, assistance for communities with emerging gang problems, and input to policymakers and program administrators. The NAGIA is not meant to replace or duplicate the services provided by any other entity. Rather, it facilitates and supports regional gang investigators associations; the Regional Information Sharing Systems (RISS); as well as federal, state, and local anti-gang initiatives.

? The NAGIA has partnered with the National Gang Intelligence Center, The Global Intelligence Working Group, the National Youth Gang Center and the RISS Projects to coordinate the sharing of gang intelligence in order to foster information sharing among law enforcement officials involved in the daily investigation and apprehension of violent gang members.

? In 2002 and again in 2005, the NAGIA and the Bureau of Justice Assistance commissioned the National Gang Threat Assessment. To date, this is the most comprehensive and scientific study of

gang trends across our country. Additional funding is needed to begin the 2007 Threat Assessment.

? Local law enforcement is the frontline in the war on gangs and gang violence. 80% of all gangs are local and homegrown groups engaged in daily criminal activity in large and small communities, urban and rural, and every type of neighborhood in between. These gangs range in size from the minimum accepted definitions of three subjects to as large as several hundred. They cross all cultural boundaries in the make up of their membership and the ages range from 9 to 40 as a median. Too often, the media has confused the public linking the immigration issue as the major cause of gang problems and gang crime in the United States.

? Intelligence gaps still exist between law enforcement agencies and this hampers our ability to investigate and apprehend violators as well as present cases for prosecution, both locally and in the federal system. These gaps can be closed with the implementation of national reporting through the Violent Gang and Terrorist Organization File, VGTOF, an already existing database through the NCIC program.

? Criminal gangs have stepped up recruiting efforts over the years and few States have addressed the issue through legislative means. The NAGIA endorses those sections of the bill that allow for the prosecution of gang recruitment. In 2004, the Justice Department reported that there were 559,566 full time law enforcement employees in the United States (UCR Report) and intelligence reports and the NAGIA/BJA threat assessment showed during that same period there were approximately 680,000 to 700,000 documented and validated gang members in the US.

? For a number of years, federal law enforcement partners have been hampered in their efforts to investigate and arrest juvenile gang offenders. They have relied on their state and local partners to handle this ever growing portion of gang violence. Juveniles are often leaders or shot callers of the most violent gangs and often escape the consequences of their illegal actions because many states do not have tough gang laws with stiff penalties for juveniles or the state and local juvenile justice systems are overwhelmed with heavy case loads. The NAGIA also supports this aspect of the bill.

? Witness intimidation is a major problem for local law enforcement officials especially local prosecutors. Many violent gang cases are dropped or lost in local courts because witnesses do not or cannot come forward. Most local jurisdictions do not have the resources necessary to fund witness protection programs. The NAGIA supports and endorses the portions of the bill which assist law enforcement in this capacity.

? Law enforcement plays only one of three roles needed for communities and the country to deal with the issue of gang violence and gang crime. We are the suppression arm of the comprehensive approach needed. The NAGIA has partnered with the National Youth Gang Center and the GREAT program and endorses prevention and intervention efforts across the nation. Local non profits and faith based groups have assisted police departments in their efforts to prevent our young people from joining gangs and when they do want to leave the gang lifestyle, have assisted those who choose to do so. Without all of these components, the efforts will be in vain. The bill is part of the suppression arm and we welcome and endorse its passage.

My thanks to the committee and the members for inviting me to speak today and for your attention to this very important matter. I am available to answer any questions you may have.

Submitted, the 5th day of June, 2007 on behalf of the National Alliance of Gang Investigator Associations, NAGIA.

Detective Patrick A. Word, NAGIA Executive Board for James Keeble, President NAGIA