

Statement of

The Honorable Russ Feingold

United States Senator
Wisconsin
June 20, 2007

Statement of U.S. Senator Russell D. Feingold
Senate Committee on the Judiciary
Hearing on "Rising Violent Crime in the Aftermath of Hurricane Katrina"
Wednesday, June 20, 2007

Mr. Chairman, thank you for chairing this hearing and for drawing attention to the criminal justice crisis in New Orleans - yet another of the tragic effects of Hurricane Katrina. At a time when the nation is struggling with an increase in violent crime, the stories from New Orleans are heartrending.

I know, coming from Wisconsin--one of the states hardest hit by the rising crime rate--the toll that this increase in crime takes on communities. But as the witnesses at this hearing are telling us, New Orleans faces unique and unimaginable challenges. Their criminal justice infrastructure is gone. The local police force is working out of FEMA trailers and U-Haul trucks. The sheriff has resorted to housing offenders in tents. There is virtually no funding for the indigent defense system. As Anthony Cannatella of the New Orleans Police Department explained in his testimony, New Orleans is "faced with the daily reality of an imminent collapse of our criminal justice institutions."

New Orleans is facing a rising violent crime rate not only with grossly insufficient resources for law enforcement, but also with grossly insufficient resources to build or maintain the elements of a basic community infrastructure such as housing, schools, and businesses to provide jobs. Restoring these services must be a part of any crime control strategy. As New Orleans resident Eric E. Malveau, who has worked as both a prosecutor and a public defender, said in a February 2007 New York Times article on crime in New Orleans, "You can put a cop on every corner, and you will not stop the murders. . . [Y]ou have a large population that is uneducated and has no job and no hope. . . Until you fix that, it's hard to see the problems getting much better."

The federal government has an obligation to help. But the response must address these underlying problems and this absence of hope, as well the need to rebuild the criminal justice infrastructure. Just as in any community, prevention and intervention programming should be an integral part of the crime fighting strategy.

Mr. Chairman, the continuing problems faced by New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina deserve our attention, and I appreciate your holding this hearing. Thank you.