

Testimony of
Charles Ramsey

February 27, 2008

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Testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on Crime and Drugs February
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Chairman Biden, Ranking Member Graham, Senator Specter and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss this very important topic. My name is Charles H. Ramsey, and I am the Commissioner of Police for the City of Philadelphia. Like many American cities, the City of Philadelphia has been struggling in recent years with an increase in many types of violent crime. We have had to endure these troubles at a time of declining support from the federal government. As you are all well aware, funding for the Byrne Justice Program has been cut almost in half over the past two years, and funding for the COPS program has been nearly eliminated. Other funding sources have also been reduced dramatically. I am here to talk to you about the challenges we face and the ways that the federal government can help. With additional funds, we, like many other major city police departments, could increase the number of police officers on the street, enhance our technological capabilities, improve the training of our officers on the best practices of modern policing, and rehabilitate our inadequate facilities.

My testimony reflects what Philadelphia is experiencing and doing about violent crime. However, Philadelphia's experience is reflective of what other major cities are experiencing across this country. The Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) surveyed 56 jurisdictions in 2005 and 2006 and reported that many cities saw homicides increase 20 percent or more. The results of 2007 were more promising in some cities while others are still seeing increases in violence.

During the past two years, Philadelphians have borne a relentless assault on our sense of security. During the years 2005 and 2006, the City witnessed more than one homicide a day, making Philadelphia the most dangerous large city in America. The number of homicides of young people in 2006 was the highest level since 1997 and more than two young people a day suffered gunshot wounds. In 2007, the number of homicides declined from 406 to 392. The downward trend has continued so far through the New Year, but we are still at 46 murders for the year. The last week has been a particularly difficult one, with 11 murders. We all agree that even one murder is too many. Therefore, we must continue to work diligently to improve our policing efforts and protect our citizens.

On the day of his inauguration, Mayor Michael Nutter asked me to develop a crime fighting strategy, which he and I delivered to the City on January 30. The focus of the crime fighting strategy is a return to the basics of policing, combining what works from traditional crime fighting with the best of community policing. It is a bold, aggressive plan for a long-term,

sustainable reduction of violent crime in Philadelphia. The strategy, which is already being implemented, has several components, including the following strategies:

1. Put more cops back on the neighborhood beat. By May 1st we will put two-hundred (200) more officers on the street in Uniform Patrol. This will be accomplished through redeployment, hiring new officers, and the temporary use of overtime. With these additional forces, PPD will increase the number of foot and bike patrols. The administration's goal is to put a total of 400 officers on the street over the next year.
2. Focus on the toughest neighborhoods. We found that 65% of our violent crimes were concentrated in nine patrol districts. Our plan targets our efforts, establishing Targeted Enforcement Zones within those districts. PPD will immediately implement aggressive, proven strategies, including, but not limited to: lawful stop and frisk procedures, increased VUFA (violation of uniform firearm act) and aggravated assault warrant service, and increased lost and stolen gun investigations. The Department will immediately begin training officers in order to implement these tactics.
3. Expand the use of technology that works. We will expand our existing surveillance camera program from 26 to 250 cameras by December 31, 2008. The administration plans to add an additional 250 cameras by July 2009.

The Crime Fighting Strategy is intended to achieve Mayor Nutter's goal of reducing homicides by thirty to fifty percent over the next three to five years. I believe that it can work, and the Mayor, in his recently introduced budget, has given our Department additional funds to implement the plan. However, major urban areas are feeling the affect of the recent down turn in the U.S. economy. Local and state tax revenues are declining while there is an increasing demand for public services. Cities need federal financial help in fighting violent crime.

Let me briefly list some of the many ways that federal resources could assist us in our efforts. For several years, the federal government provided funds to support the hiring of additional police officers. Between April 1, 1995 and August 31, 1999, the City of Philadelphia hired 773 police officers under the COPS program. However, despite the efforts of Senator Biden and others, the funding for that program has been drastically scaled back since 2002. As a result of this change and other challenges, the number of police officers on the streets declined for several years. Mayor Nutter, with assistance from Pennsylvania Governor Edward G. Rendell, is working to reverse this trend, and the FY2009 budget contains funding to hire new officers. However, the City has many demands on its limited resources. Federal support for the COPS program would enable us to get more desperately-needed officers on the street.

Basic, aggressive, community-based policing is the most important crime fighting tool that a police department can implement, and this kind of policing requires up-to-date, intense training of police officers in several techniques, including community engagement and targeted tactics such as stop-question-frisk.

As part of the crime plan, my Department has committed to work with local community groups to develop a "community orientation" program for newly assigned officers to a district. The objective of the program will be to familiarize our officers with their newly assigned community

and for the communities to better know their officers. At the same time, community relations officers will provide training for neighborhood leaders about the police department. Community policing is a time-intensive process that requires a deep understanding of the neighborhoods we serve. Additional federal funding would enable us to collect more sophisticated data about neighborhood conditions and needs and to enhance our training and community outreach efforts.

Although our patrol officers are the front line of our public safety system, technology also plays a crucial role in a comprehensive crime fighting strategy. Because of declining resources, the Philadelphia Police Department is behind in its application of modern technology to prevent and to solve crimes. There are numerous areas where additional funds to enhance our technology would make a major difference in our ability to protect our citizens. One example is surveillance cameras, which are excellent tools to document and prosecute criminals. In addition to serving these purposes, their mere presence has a dramatic deterrent effect, preventing crime in the immediate area. The FY 2009 City Budget includes funding for an additional 250 cameras, but many more areas could be covered with federal assistance.

Another area in which the technology would improve public safety would be through enhancing our response to violent crimes with the purchase of mobile rapid response command centers. These units, which are used in many cities, would enable investigators to immediately access databases to obtain the information needed to solve crimes. Such technology would greatly improve our ability to close cases and, equally importantly, to prevent the loss of any further life through retaliatory violence. The Department is hoping to purchase at least 5 of these vehicles, and federal resources would make this possible.

Another area where additional resources would help is by supporting improvements in the Department's investigation of gun crimes. Criminals who use guns during the commission of a crime are a direct and imminent danger to our communities. The federal gun laws have substantial penalties which include mandatory minimum sentencing. Thus, the Philadelphia Police Department is working with the U.S. Attorney's Office and the ATF to substantially increase the number of gun cases prosecuted at the federal level. However, it is very difficult to make progress in this area given the limitations of the Department's ballistic investigation system, which currently has a backlog of 6,000 pieces of ballistic evidence waiting to be tested. This impedes the Department's ability to identify and prosecute offenders. Additional federal resources would enable us to get through this backlog and get guns off the streets.

Finally, the Department, like police forces in many other cities, suffers from an overwhelming need for capital investment. Old decrepit facilities and an aging and high mileage vehicle fleet hamper effective crime fighting and lower morale. A recently completed study by the Pennsylvania Intergovernmental Cooperation Authority concluded that the City's police stations and training facilities are among the most dilapidated publicly-owned buildings in the City's inventory. Mayor Nutter has committed in the FY2009 budget to make investments to improve this situation, and the Department is working with the City to develop a multi-year capital improvement plan to repair or replace aging police facilities and an information technology plan to bring the department into the twenty-first century. However, without state and federal resources, it will take decades to bring our facilities up to modern standards.

These are just some of the many areas in which additional federal resources would make a major difference in the lives of our residents. As we all know, the daily assault of violent crime falls harder on some of us than others. The televised grief of family members devastated by a shooting seems to lead the news every evening. But even families untouched by violence and neighborhoods untainted by mayhem are demoralized by death and disorder in our city. It is the job of the Mayor, the Police Commissioner, and the whole police force to unite the resources of the whole community to calm the violence, restore order, and begin to build a tangible future for people who today don't see one.

Of course, a homicide is often the end result of a series of negative and misguided actions, events and decisions. Programs aimed at prevention, such as the Byrne Justice Program supported Youth Violence Reduction Partnership (YVRP) have had measurable successes in intervening in young peoples' lives, and providing intensive services to those most likely to kill or be killed. We are thankful to Senator Specter for his leadership in recognizing the importance of disrupting the cycle of violence in the lives of our young people and for securing funds for this program. However, with current funding YVRP only serves a small percentage of our population. Additional federal resources would help us achieve our goal of making the program city-wide.

I should also mention that In Philadelphia, we are working towards a holistic public safety effort that focuses not just on prevention but the re-entry of ex-offenders as well. The Philadelphia Re-Entry Program, or PREP, provides incentives to businesses to employ ex-offenders, because the best crime prevention program is a job. We are grateful to Senator Specter for recognizing the merits of this program and for proposing a similar initiative at the federal level.

Finally, we must not forget that our major urban areas are still terrorist targets. The belief is that the terrorists have not forgotten us but are planning their next big attack. Local law enforcement officer will be among the first responders to a terrorist attack and may be the one to prevent an impending attack. The local neighborhood terrorist is the focus of major city police departments. However, we are will aware of our dual responsibility to neighborhood security and homeland security. We are stretched thin and past homeland security funding was essential to bring local police departments up to the task of homeland security. Now is not the time to retreat on that commitment. Congress must fund the Law Enforcement Terrorism Prevention Program (LETPP) at \$500 million and as its own line item. We are also need stability in the urban areas covered under the Urban Areas Security Initiative (UASI) for planning and sustainability. Local law enforcement officers have proven they can fight neighborhood crime and prevent and respond to terrorist attacks but we need your help.

No community prospers or even survives long without safety. Safety is why people come together to govern themselves in the first place. Just as providing for the common defense is the fundamental obligation of our national government, it is the very first obligation of local government is to protect the lives of its residents. Mayor Michael Nutter and I have committed to making the safety of every Philadelphian a priority for this administration. Like other cities, we could use some help in doing this.

I thank Senators Biden and Specter for organizing this hearing on this vital topic, and I thank the members of the Committee for their consideration.