

Statement of
The Honorable Russ Feingold

United States Senator
Wisconsin
February 27, 2008

"Supporting the Front Line in the Fight Against Crime: Restoring Federal Funding for State and Local Law Enforcement"

Subcommittee on Crime and Drugs
Wednesday, February 27, 2008

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your leadership on this issue over the years, and thank you for chairing this very important hearing.

I, too, am deeply concerned about the current state of federal funding for grants that aid state and local law enforcement agencies. The fiscal year 2008 funding levels were far too low, and for fiscal year 2009, the President's budget proposal once again proposes to slash funding for these programs.

Congress, in partnership with states and local communities, has an obligation to help provide the tools, technology and training that our nation's law enforcement officers need to protect our communities. That is why I have consistently supported a number of federal grant programs, including the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant Program, which provides critical funding to help fight violent and drug-related crime, and the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Program, which is instrumental in providing funding on a range of crime-fighting techniques. I have heard again and again how important these programs have been to Wisconsin law enforcement efforts.

But both of these important programs have suffered funding cuts in recent years, and the Byrne program was hit especially hard in fiscal year 2008. Unfortunately, this trend continues in the President's budget proposal for fiscal year 2009, in which he eliminates funding for both of these programs, replacing them with new, and woefully underfunded proposals. Congress has authorized spending for these programs at a combined total of more than \$2 billion, but the President proposes that they be replaced with new, untested programs that add up to only \$400 million - and under the President's proposal that money would also have to fund numerous other initiatives beyond the scope of the current Byrne and COPS programs.

Congress must reject the President's proposals, as it has before.

The Byrne Justice Assistance Grant Program is critical in the fight against violent and drug-related crime. This key program supports multi-jurisdictional drug task forces, drug courts, drug education and prevention programs, and many other efforts to reduce drug abuse and prosecute drug offenders. The money also goes toward domestic violence prosecutors, community prosecution programs, crime victim services, and community corrections programs. These

programs have been very important to law enforcement efforts in Milwaukee and throughout Wisconsin, but Byrne funding has been subject to relentless cuts. Although Congress has authorized \$1.095 billion annually for this program, the fiscal year 2008 appropriation for Byrne was just \$170 million - a sliver of the authorized amount, and also a dramatic cut from the \$520 million that Congress appropriated to Byrne grants in fiscal year 2007. In Wisconsin alone, that results in a \$4.1 million reduction in federal funds to state and local law enforcement between fiscal year 2007 and fiscal year 2008. And according to the Wisconsin District Attorneys Association, it will result in the loss of funding for 21 prosecutors, at a time when there are already far too many prosecutorial positions in Wisconsin that are unfilled. This is simply unacceptable; our state and local law enforcement deserve and rightfully demand more support from the federal government in keeping our communities safe.

The COPS program provides funding to train new officers, to invest in crime-fighting technologies, and to fight methamphetamine abuse, among other things. It has fared better in fiscal year 2008 than Byrne, but more funding is still needed. Congress has authorized \$1.05 billion annually for the various components of the COPS program, which support a range of law enforcement priorities. Despite the COPS Program's record of effectiveness, funding has steadily decreased under the current Administration. The COPS Program's fiscal year 2008 appropriation of \$587 million is 37 percent less than its funding in FY 2003 and just over half of its authorized amount. Funding for state and local law enforcement grant programs has followed a dangerous downward trend, even as the needs of law enforcement officers, our first responders, grow.

I have been hearing for years now from Wisconsin law enforcement officials about the increase in violent crime in their communities. Indeed, according to the 2006 FBI Uniform Crime Report, violent crime in Wisconsin increased by a staggering 18.1 percent between 2005 and 2006. While the recently released preliminary FBI statistics for 2007 show some signs of improvement, they unfortunately also indicate that overall violent crime rates have continued to rise in both Milwaukee and Green Bay. And yet the federal government continues to turn its back and as a result, state and local agencies are being stretched to the breaking point.

Byrne and COPS grants are a critical part of the federal effort to help our state and local partners combat violent crime. I will continue to work with Senator Biden and others to secure adequate funding for both these critical grant programs. Congress must make this a priority.