

Statement of
The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator
Vermont
May 12, 2009

Statement Of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee,
Hearing On "Helping State And Local Law Enforcement"
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This week is National Police Week, when we pay tribute to the men and women who work every day to protect our communities, our schools, and our homes, and we remember those who died in the line of duty. Across this country, more than 900,000 men and women in law enforcement work tirelessly day in and day out to keep us safe. Of those brave men and women, 133 gave their lives this past year, and more than 18,000 have died in this country's history. We owe them not just our gratitude, but our commitment to do everything we can to help them in their vital mission.

That is why, as this new Congress began, this Committee responded to the immense strain law enforcement is experiencing as a result of the economic downturn. I chaired the Committee's first hearing of the year, which examined the urgent need for increased Federal assistance to state and local law enforcement. At that hearing, police chiefs and experts from around the country agreed that the current economic crisis makes Federal aid to state and local law enforcement even more important, and that law enforcement funding will have an immediate economic impact.

Following that hearing, I worked hard with others in Congress and with the administration to ensure that the recovery legislation included a major infusion of funds for state and local law enforcement. Vice President Biden has long been a leader on this issue, and President Obama has consistently been a strong supporter, as well.

The recovery legislation that Congress passed and the President signed into law included nearly \$4 billion for state and local law enforcement. It included, among other things, \$1 billion for the Community Oriented Policing Services program, to put more police officers onto the streets, \$2 billion for Byrne Justice Assistance Grants for state and local law enforcement, \$125 million for rural drug enforcement assistance grants, \$100 million for state Victim Compensation and Assistance programs, and \$50 million for Internet Crimes Against Children Task Forces.

That money is already making its way to the states, and it is already making a difference. To date, \$460 million has already been awarded in Byrne grants for state and local law enforcement, and \$95 million has already been awarded for victim assistance. Police departments are retaining officers who would have been laid off, making new hires, and strengthening effective programs, rather than cutting them.

The need for this assistance could not have been more urgent. Tough economic times create conditions that can too easily lead to a spike in crime. Earlier this year, USA Today reported a study by the Police Executive Research Forum finding that nearly half of the 233 police agencies surveyed had seen significant increases in crime since the economic crisis began. With unemployment on the rise and tax revenues plummeting, the conditions are ripe for crime rates to climb again, while states and municipalities are being forced to slash their budgets, including critical funding for police.

The need for this funding is all the more important because the Bush administration over the past eight years abandoned the support for state and local law enforcement that reduced crime rates to record lows in the 1990s. Since 2001, Federal support for local police has been cut in half. These cuts have left many police forces large and small with more vacancies than at any time since 9/11.

The funding included in the recovery legislation for state and local law enforcement will not only help to address vital crime prevention needs, but will also have an immediate and positive impact on the economy. Hiring new police officers will stimulate the economy as fast as, or faster than, other spending. For construction jobs, only 30 to 40 percent of the funds go to salaries, but in police hiring, nearly 100 percent of the money goes to creating jobs.

Supporting local police also helps economic development more broadly. Over the past decade, entrepreneurs and hardworking homeowners have brought new life to once stagnant, often crime-ridden communities in inner cities and rural towns across the country. As these communities became safer, property values rose, businesses thrived, and local economies prospered. If crime returns, these economic gains will be lost.

Recovery funding is already making a difference. The positive impact of the stimulus funding becomes clear when you look at individual states, like my home state of Vermont. Under the Recovery Act, Vermont will receive nearly \$5 million for Byrne grants for state and local law enforcement, more than \$500,000 for victim compensation and assistance programs, and more than \$400,000 to fight internet crimes against children. Among the largest recipients of these funds in Vermont will be the cities of Rutland and St. Albans, where the Judiciary Committee held hearings in the last Congress that showed that crime and drugs are not just big city issues and that rural communities, even those joining together to tackle the scourge of crime, need help.

This law enforcement funding, together with other budget decisions, has allowed the Vermont State Police, the state's largest sworn police force, to avoid laying off even a single uniformed officer. This stimulus money will also help police departments hire new personnel in places like Burlington, which has continued to be a law enforcement innovator. For the first time, with these Federal funds, there will be a full time mental health worker assigned to work with police on the street, which will reduce the need for uniformed police to provide mental health services and free them up for more traditional law enforcement.

I want to welcome today's witnesses, who can shed much light on the challenges state and local law enforcement are facing and how the recovery funds will meet those challenges. Lieutenant Kris Carlson heads the Vermont Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) Task Force, a special unit that targets online and other sexual predators. This unit plays a crucial role for law

enforcement in Vermont, as few local police departments have the resources or expertise to focus on the latest internet technologies or to conduct the computer forensics needed to gather electronic evidence.

The impact of this unit was never clearer to anyone living in Vermont than the days after the disappearance of Brooke Bennett, a 12-year-old girl from Randolph, Vermont. Her disappearance led to one of the most intense, fast-moving investigations in our state's history. The members of the Vermont ICAC worked side by side with the FBI and other specialists, and they broke the case using their specialized computer skills to identify the perpetrator, who now stands charged with kidnapping and murder in federal court.

I visited this special unit along with FBI Director Mueller last summer, and together we thanked the all the investigators and prosecutors who worked the Bennett case. This unit, staffed by sophisticated and well-trained experts, would never have existed but for Federal assistance. It faced serious cut backs as a result of the faltering economy. But with the Recovery Act funding, all the jobs in the unit will be saved, and I know every person in Vermont is thankful that our children are safer because of it.

I want also to welcome Associate Attorney General Perrelli, who is already working hard to ensure that the law enforcement funding set out in the recovery legislation is put to the most effective use possible to keep our communities safe; Chief Flynn from Milwaukee, who has been outspoken in saying that only if we support effective police strategies can we ensure economic recovery; and Mr. Mulhausen, whom I enjoyed meeting in January and welcome back again.

I hope all Senators will agree with me that supporting state and local law enforcement makes our communities safer and keeps our trust with the brave men and women who lay their lives on the line for us every day. It is also an essential part of getting our economy and our communities moving again. I look forward to learning more about our progress on this crucial issue today.

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