

Statement of

The Honorable Patrick Leahy

United States Senator

June 20, 2011

**Statement Of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Chairman, Senate Judiciary Committee
Hearing On "Building Safer Communities: The Importance Of Effective Federal-Local
Collaboration In Law Enforcement"
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I thank Senator Coons for holding this important hearing in Delaware today, and for his strong commitment to supporting state and local law enforcement. Today, we will hear about the critical ways that Federal and state law enforcement work together to keep our streets safe. Supporting collaboration between Federal, state and local law enforcement has long been crucial, and it remains so even in these hard economic times. This collaboration includes both information sharing and making sure that key Federal resources continue flowing to law enforcement. I look forward to hearing about both of these issues this morning.

Interagency coordination and information sharing is more important than ever. When the so-called Christmas day bomber attempted to detonate an explosive on a flight in 2009, intelligence agencies knew his identity, but his name was not on a watchlist that would have prevented him from boarding the plane. I agree with President Obama that this was a "systemic failure," and I am glad that the administration acted promptly to identify and fill gaps in our information sharing systems.

We must continue to ensure that we are able to effectively piece together the information our government agencies - Federal, state and local - collect on terrorist and criminal threats. The Fusion Centers, which we will hear about today, were designed to promote information sharing between Federal agencies such as the Federal Bureau of Investigation and state and local agencies, and they are an important part of responding to threats as efficiently and effectively as possible.

Continuing Federal support for state and local law enforcement is no less important. This Congress has focused on how best to continue the economic recovery. An effective way to both protect our citizens and create jobs is to bolster Federal resources for state and local law enforcement. When neighborhoods become safer, property values rise, businesses open, and local economies prosper.

Like Vermont, Delaware is a small State where neighboring jurisdictions are close by and cooperation and interoperability are especially critical among state and Federal partners. My attention to information sharing and law enforcement safety was shaped significantly by the Carl Drega incident in Vermont and New Hampshire in August of 1997, during which four people were killed, including two New Hampshire State Police officers, and three other law enforcement officers were wounded. I expect many in law enforcement are familiar with this incident.

During that terrible tragedy, I saw how information sharing deficiencies and the lack of bulletproof vests made the jobs of those incredibly brave law enforcement officers so much more

difficult. The Senate acted quickly as the result of that incident, and one of things Senator Judd Gregg and I did was to provide funding to state and local law enforcement to create communications interoperability.

As a Senator, I have never lost sight of how important it is to provide state and local law enforcement officials with the support they need, and to support the partnership between state and Federal law enforcement entities. It is truly one of the best investments we can make in Congress.

Crime dramatically affects communities across the country, from bigger cities like Wilmington, to smaller towns like those across Vermont and Delaware. In this environment, the Federal Government must do everything we can to assist states and communities. This morning, we have a distinguished panel of witnesses representing Federal, state, and local law enforcement. Each of you brings a unique perspective to law enforcement collaboration, and I look forward to your testimony.

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