

Statement of
The Honorable Joseph R. Biden, Jr.

United States Senator
Delaware
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Opening Statement of Senator Joseph R. Biden, Jr.
Senate Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on Crime and Drugs
Hearing on Rising Crime in the United States
"Examining the Federal Role in Helping Communities Prevent and Respond to Violent Crime"
May 23, 2007

Good morning. I'm glad that you all could be here today to address a subject which I have been dedicated to during my 34 years in the Senate: how the federal government can help state and local officials create safe, vibrant communities by preventing crime. I want to thank and welcome our distinguished experts. I have some old friends here who have worked with me for years, and some new friends with whom I look forward to working with to make some real changes in our funding mechanism for local law enforcement.

Last week we observed National Police Week, reminding us that there are those who sacrifice every day, those who are willing to make the ultimate sacrifice, to protect our communities. We meet today against the backdrop of an insidious resurgence of violent crime in communities across the country.

For the first time in more than a decade, crime is on the rise. The 2005 FBI Uniform Crime Report found that murders are up 3.4 percent - the largest percentage increase in 15 years - with 16,692 murders in 2005 - the most since 1998. The report also found that other types of violent crime, including forcible rape, robbery, and aggravated assault, rose 2.3 percent.

The Police Executive Research Forum's recent study of crime in 56 cities found that over the past two years homicides increased more than 10% nationwide and more than 20% in many major cities. I am troubled by these trends but, quite frankly, I am not surprised. The Federal government has taken its focus off street crime since 9/11, asking law enforcement to do more with less. The Administration has understandably dedicated vast federal resources to counterterrorism, but it has done so at the expense of law enforcement, our communities are suffering the consequences.

The President has killed the COPS hiring program and drastically cut Justice Assistance Grants. The President has also re-directed 1,000 FBI agents from crime to counterterrorism and, as a result, violent crime investigations by the FBI are down by 60 percent. Fewer police on the street preventing crime and protecting communities means more crime - it's as simple that. Our sheriffs and police officers have done an extraordinary job in the face of diminishing federal support, but

they need our help. We cannot focus on terrorism at the expense of fighting crime - we need to do both.

We have to get back to basics. More than a decade ago, we faced a similar violent crime crisis. We overcame that crisis by supporting local law enforcement with the tools and resources they needed to prevent crime whenever possible and to punish crime whenever necessary. We passed the most sweeping anti-crime bill in our history and created the Community Oriented Policing Services Program - the COPS program. We funded 118,000 local officers, expanding community policing across the nation.

And it worked - crime rates fell for eight straight years. Violent crime dropped 26 percent; the murder rate dropped 34 percent. The Government Accountability Office has documented the success of these anti-crime measures and a recent Brookings Institute study found that the COPS program was one of the most cost-effective programs for combating crime. In fact, the Brookings Institute found that for every dollar spent on COPS, we save six to twelve dollars for the public overall.

Today we have several distinguished experts to help us understand how to best use federal resources to reverse these trends and to help make our communities safe again and I look forward to discussing these issues with them.

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