

Testimony of
The Honorable Viet D. Dinh

December 5, 2001

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you. It is an honor. Chairman Biden, the Administration and the Department acknowledge and appreciate your continued friendship with and support of state and local law enforcement. We value your efforts in this area. The Department was pleased to work with you, and to support, your amendment to S. 1, the Better Education for Students and Teachers Act, which reauthorized school resource officers as part of the COPS Program. I am confident that we will continue to work together to provide efficient and effective resources to our men and women in blue.

One thing I have learned since coming to the Department is the critical role state and local law enforcement authorities play in partnership with the Department in carrying out our joint mission of protecting freedom through law. The bonds of this partnership have been strengthened in our common endeavor to protect the safety and security of Americans against the current threat of terror. In this war, the Department depends on the 18,000 state and local police agencies to help us prevent future attacks. We value this partnership, but more than that, we need this partnership to fully discharge our responsibility to protect America against future threats. The COPS office is one very tangible way the Department has maintained its partnership with state and local law enforcement agencies by assisting those agencies in their policing efforts.

I know that you have scheduled this hearing because the members of this Committee care about our federal government's relationship with state and local law enforcement officers. The President and the Attorney General share that concern and believe that the Department of Justice must do all it can to ensure an effective partnership with the state and local law enforcement officers who protect us on the front lines within the United States. It is because of the Department's strong support for the men and women in blue that we believe it is important to provide resources, such as those provided through the COPS program, responsibly and efficiently.

Since the inception of COPS in 1994, \$8.6 billion has been used through COPS grants to add officers to our streets, enhance technology, support crime prevention, and advance community policing. All of these efforts have been undertaken with the objective of creating and maintaining an effective partnership with state and local law enforcement. Like you, the Department recognizes the benefits to be derived from a federal partnership with local law enforcement, and strongly advocates community policing. Community policing disrupts, displaces and ultimately prevents street crime. The Department and the Administration are committed to a beneficial local/federal law enforcement partnership, but it is not enough to simply put a dollar amount or a certain number of officers on the street as evidence of our commitment. Rather, the challenge is to provide resources to state and local law enforcement in a fiscally responsible way so as to

address the most pressing needs of law enforcement and to maximize the results. This requires a willingness to improve grant programs like those provided through COPS, to ensure that limited funds are well spent and provided in the most effective and useful way to those local agencies that need assistance.

The President, through his budget proposals, has indicated a shift of priorities from the previous Administration. This shift is one away from federally funded hiring of officers and toward the provision of adequate equipment and technology to state and local law enforcement agencies which often go without necessary law enforcement technology. In fact, law enforcement agencies consistently cite technology as one of their most critical needs. Particularly in this new war on terrorism, it has been demonstrated that having up-to-date technology is crucial for successful investigations and for the information sharing that is desperately needed among law enforcement agencies at all levels. The partnership between the Department of Justice and state and local law enforcement is of the highest importance in our war on terrorism, in which these local officers are on the front lines every day. We rely on state and local agencies and thus, must be committed to using our resources in the most efficient manner to support them. Technology is the key to successful law enforcement.

In addition, investigations require current equipment and technologies, comparable to the very equipment and technologies to which terrorists and other criminals have access. Information sharing among law enforcement agencies is incomplete if agencies lack the necessary equipment and technology to record, store, and retrieve such information. For example, state and local law enforcement agencies must have adequate equipment to fully use existing federal resources such as RISS, the Regional Information Sharing System. And, consistent with the goals of COPS, the provision of technologies that offer police departments more efficiency leads to officers spending more time on the streets and less time in the office. Unfortunately, recent appropriations for COPS have extensively earmarked our technology assistance funds, removing much of our flexibility for working with state and local law enforcement agencies.

Although this shift from hiring to technology was made prior to September 11th, the events of that day only reinforce the need for this shift in priorities. Having already well exceeded the previous Administration's goal of funding an additional 100,000 officers on the street, we need not set new artificial goals in terms of the number of officers. Instead, we seek to shift resources while retaining the availability of hiring grants that will provide the flexibility to police departments that was missing in the initial hiring grants available through COPS. I also would like to note that COPS continues to pursue a strong training and technical assistance program in support of community policing.

In addition to the clear need to shift our resources to where they will be most useful, it must also be recognized that the grants provided through COPS for hiring additional officers have not been as effective as hoped, and have indeed been difficult to monitor. The COPS program has provided significant resources in the past, but with well-documented flaws that were identified in the 1999 Inspector General's Audit Report of COPS. The President and the Department do not believe anyone supports continued use of COPS dollars for inappropriate activities. While such abuses have occurred in a very small fraction of the total COPS grants awarded, the Department and the COPS Office are striving to prevent any future abuses. Our focus is to improve these

programs to support the community policing purpose of COPS. We are committed to making COPS a more effective grant-making organization.

It should be recognized that the grants provided through COPS have been difficult to monitor. However, in response to the critical report issued by the Inspector General, the COPS Office has implemented a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach to monitor more than 32,700 grants. This approach includes annual progress reports submitted by grantees and more intensive monitoring of high-risk grantees, including Inspector General audits of those grantees. The COPS Office thoroughly investigates all allegations of grant misuse which come to their attention through the media, citizen complaints, union or officer complaints and grantees themselves. The Office also conducts site visits and desk reviews. By focusing grant funds on local law enforcement needs and monitoring grants after they have been awarded, the Department believes the COPS program will be able to provide even better support to local law enforcement agencies.

Just as we are accountable to this Committee and the American people for the responsible administration of COPS, we must demand that these grant programs be accountable to the men and women in blue, whom these programs are intended to support. The Department seeks to improve the COPS grant programs by making them more user friendly, effective, and accountable for any failings. We want to see progress as a result of the dollars spent and we need to see police departments provided the resources they actually need. In short, the Department is committed to improving the COPS Program, not maintaining the status quo.

When the Attorney General appointed Carl Peed as the Director of COPS, he clearly demonstrated his commitment to the COPS program as part of a larger commitment to responsibly providing assistance to police departments. This is a commitment the President shares wholeheartedly. Carl Peed has been involved in state and local law enforcement for nearly 30 years and brings with him the experience and perspective necessary to provide law enforcement agencies with the best resources. The Department has complete confidence in Director Peed's ability to carry out these policies through effective and flexible programs.

As new problems confront law enforcement in our country, COPS will be an intricate part of combating these problems. The Department remains committed to community policing and looks forward to continued success in our fight against crime, a fight in which COPS is clearly a part.

Again, I thank you for the opportunity to be here today and would be happy to answer any questions.