

Testimony of
Mark Epley

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Senior Counsel to the Deputy Attorney General
U.S. Department of Justice
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Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Graham, Members of the Subcommittee, I am Mark Epley, Senior Counsel to the Deputy Attorney General of the U.S. Department of Justice.

My role as the senior counsel is to advise and assist the Deputy Attorney General in formulating and implementing the Department's budget and to oversee the Department's grant making components, including the Office of Justice Programs (OJP), Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), and the Office on Violence Against Women (OVW). I am pleased to be here today to discuss crime rates in United States and what the Department is doing to help communities prevent and respond to violent crime.

The Department of Justice uses two programs to measure nationwide crime rates: the National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), which measures crimes as experienced by victims, including crimes not reported to police; and the FBI's Uniform Crime Report (UCR) which measures crime reported to police occurring to people, businesses and organizations. Both programs should be viewed as complementary rather than competing measures of crime. The Federal government relies on both programs in order to comprehensively analyze crime. Each program contributes significantly to our understanding of the crime problem in the United States.

Due in large part to the hard work of law enforcement, recent data from the 2005 NCVS and UCR revealed that the Nation's crime rates remain near historic lows. After a dramatic rise in violent crime that peaked in the early to mid 1990s, crime rates have been falling precipitously ever since. Although 2005 data revealed slight increases in the number of violent crimes (murder, robbery and, to a lesser extent, aggravated assault), it is important to note that 2005 has the second-lowest rate recorded by the UCR in the past 30 years. Only 2004 had a lower violent crime rate. The overall rate of violent crime reported to the police decreased 39 percent in the past 13 years before 2004. In 2005 there was a small uptick of 1 percent.

Overall the current data do not reveal nationwide trends. Rather, they show increases locally in a number of communities. Observed increases in violent crime are sharpest in medium-sized cities. No change is observed among the largest cities. In addition, the data do not identify any single reason for the observed increases in cities experiencing an upward trend.

For example, while the United States experienced a 2.4% increase in the murder rate in 2005 (to the second-lowest rate ever recorded, identical to the murder rate in 2001 and 2002), the Northeast experienced a 5.3% increase in the murder rate at the same time the South experienced a 0.8% increase and the West experienced a 1.7% increase in the murder rate.

Similarly, while the United States experienced a 2.9% increase in the robbery rate, the Midwest experienced a 7.3% increase in the robbery rate at the same time the Northeast experienced a 2.9% increase, the West a 1.0% increase, and the South a 1.9% increase in the robbery rate.

0123456% Increase in Homicide Rate
Figure 1: Homicide Statistics by Region
Nationally Northeast Midwest South West
012345678% Increase in Robbery Rate
Figure 2: Robbery Statistics by Region
Nationally Northeast Midwest South West

In 2005, there was a 5.7% increase in the number of homicides in U.S. cities as distinguished from rural and suburban areas. Cities between 100,000 and 249,999 experienced a 12.4% increase and cities between 50,000 and 99,999 experienced an 11% increase, while cities over 1,000,000 experienced a 0.6% increase and cities between 10,000 and 24,999 experienced a decline of 0.9%.

To better understand this situation, the Department of Justice visited and gathered additional information from 18 regionally distributed communities observing increases in violent crime and a number of those seeing decreases. From these meetings, the Department sought to identify common themes for the crime trends in the specific communities. The Attorney General articulated those themes in his remarks at the National Press Club last week, these included:

- ??? Presence of loosely organized local gangs or street crews
- ??? Prevalence of guns in the hands of criminals
- ??? Level of violence among youth

-5051015% Increase
Figure 3: Number of Homicides in Cities, by Population
All Cities 10,000 - 24,999 25,000 - 49,999 50,000 - 99,999 100,000 - 249,999 250,000 - 499,999 500,000 - 999,999 Over 1 million

We also observed that in some of these cities, the strategic use of police resources has been effective in combating violent crime. Effective strategies have included elements of both COMPSTAT and community-oriented approaches to policing, as well as increased collaboration of law enforcement efforts across local, state, and federal jurisdictions.

As a result of these visits, the Department is developing appropriate policies to respond to the causes identified for the increases in violent crime in the communities visited (and, to the extent possible, for other communities as well) as well as matching existing program resources with community needs. In other words, we are working with our state and local partners to identify the problems and develop meaningful strategies to reduce and deter that crime.

One consistent theme we heard was the importance of federal - local partnership. A specific example of this kind of partnership is Project Safe Neighborhoods, through which local law

enforcement and prosecutors can refer gun crime cases to the federal system. Through PSN we have doubled the number of gun crime prosecutions over the last six years compared with the preceding six years.

Another form of partnership in action is law enforcement task force activity. Some examples led by federal law enforcement include the FBI's Safe Street's Task Forces, the ATF's Violent Crime Impact Teams and the U.S. Marshal Service's fugitive apprehension task forces.

Whether partnerships through prosecution or operations, we want to continue to find ways to shore-up our relationship with State and local law enforcement, but appreciate that sometimes that cooperation takes resources.

To meet this need the President's 2008 budget requests \$200 million for the Violent Crimes Reduction Initiative. These funds will help communities address high rates of violent crime by forming and developing effective multi-jurisdictional law enforcement partnerships between local, state, tribal, and federal law enforcement agencies. Through these multi-jurisdictional partnerships, we can disrupt criminal gang, firearm, and drug activities, particularly those with a multi-jurisdictional dimension. Additionally, the Department will target funding to respond to local crime surges it detects in our ongoing research through the NCVS and the UCR.

Training will also continue to be an important component, with agencies throughout the Department focused on resources designed to assist law enforcement. Both OJP and the COPS Office provide training and technical assistance services with a focus on local solutions to common national problems. The focus of training is on current and emerging issues confronting law enforcement and the communities they serve.

In addition, the Department has begun to consolidate certain grant programs in order to increase effectiveness. Consolidation will allow state and local governments to identify their own unique needs and apply for assistance that directly addresses them. The discretionary character of some of these programs also allows the federal government to concentrate aid where it is needed most and where it shows the greatest promise of leveraging positive change.

The Byrne Public Safety and Protection Program will consolidate the Department's most successful state and local law enforcement assistance programs into a single, flexible, competitive discretionary grant program. This new approach will help state, local, and tribal governments develop programs appropriate to the particular needs of their jurisdictions. Through the competitive grant process, we will continue to assist communities in addressing a number of high-priority concerns, such as: 1) reducing violent crime at the local level through the Project Safe Neighborhood initiative; 2) addressing the criminal justice issues surrounding substance abuse through drug courts, residential treatment for prison inmates, prescription drug monitoring programs, methamphetamine enforcement and lab cleanup, and cannabis eradication efforts; 3) promoting and enhancing law enforcement information sharing efforts through improved and more accurate criminal history records; 4) improving the capacity of State and local law enforcement and justice system personnel to make use of forensic evidence and reducing DNA evidence and analysis backlogs; 5) addressing domestic trafficking in persons; 6) improving and expanding prisoner re-entry initiatives; and 7) improving services to victims of crime to facilitate their participation in the legal process. In addition to state, local, and tribal governments, non-government entities will also be eligible for funding under this program.

The Department of Justice is committed to addressing violent crime. But we must understand that crime is not evenly distributed across the United States. Rather, some regions, counties, cities, and towns experience more crime than others. Further, crime is not evenly distributed across those communities with high crime rates. Rather some neighborhoods experience more crime than others (Washington, DC is a good example). The crime pattern we are now experiencing is one of general stability in our historic national lows with volatile changes in certain communities.

By better understanding emerging crime trends and the nature of crime in the United States, we can more effectively target assistance to areas with the greatest need and allow for adjustments in funding priorities. The multi-purpose grant programs such as the Violent Crime Reduction Initiative and the Byrne Public Safety and Protection Program will provide state, local and tribal governments with increased flexibility in using grant funds to best meet the unique needs of their jurisdictions.

This concludes my statement Mr. Chairman. Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before the Subcommittee on this important subject. I am happy to answer any questions you or other Members may have. Thank you.