

Statement of  
**The Honorable Russ Feingold**

United States Senator  
Wisconsin  
May 23, 2007

Statement of Senator Russell D. Feingold  
"Rising Crime in the United States: Examining the Federal Role in Helping Communities  
Prevent and Respond to Violent Crime"  
Subcommittee on Crime and Drugs  
Wednesday, May 23, 2007

I'd like to begin by thanking Senator Biden for chairing this important hearing and by thanking the witnesses, whose expertise is greatly needed at a time when the nation is struggling with an increase in violent crime in our communities.

While we all hear about the rising crime rate in cities across America, one of those cities hardest hit is Milwaukee, Wisconsin. According to a report released by the Police Executive Research Forum, Milwaukee's homicide rates have increased by seventeen percent, robbery rates by thirty-nine percent, and aggravated assault by eighty-five percent in the past two years.

The statistics alone are staggering, but the human toll is truly heartbreaking. On Monday, May 14, just over a week ago, four-year-old Jasmine Owens was shot and killed by a drive-by shooter. She had been skipping rope in her front yard. On Thursday, February 22, Shaina Mersman was shot and killed at noon in the middle of a busy shopping area. She was eight months pregnant, and she died in the middle of the street. These are but two senseless deaths in a list of names that is far too long.

We need to figure out how to stem the tide of violence. Hearings like this and legislation such as Sen. Biden's "COPS Improvements Act of 2007," Sen. Feinstein's Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant Program bill, and my own PRECAUTION Act, which I am introducing later this week with Senator Specter, will help to do that. The PRECAUTION Act, though small in scope, is an important step in augmenting the essential financial support the federal government provides to our state and local law enforcement partners through programs such as the Byrne Justice Assistance grants or the COPS grants.

When state and local law enforcement receive federal support for policing, they have difficult decisions to make on how to spend those federal dollars. The PRECAUTION Act will create a national commission to review the range of prevention and intervention programming available, to identify the most successful strategies, and to report on those findings to the criminal justice community. It will fund a targeted grant program through the National Institute of Justice to support new and promising and innovative techniques that need federal dollars to be developed into more reliable strategies. In general, it will provide a resource for the criminal justice

community to turn to when making decisions about how to further integrate prevention and intervention strategies into traditional law enforcement practices.

I very much appreciate the support that one of our witnesses today, Ted Kamatchus, the President of the National Sheriffs' Association, gives to my bill in his testimony. Utilizing prevention and intervention strategies is both smart and necessary. The National Sheriffs' Association, the Council for Excellence in Government, the Consortium of Social Science Associations, and the American Society of Criminology have all endorsed the bill. I hope that other members of the Judiciary Committee will join Senator Specter and me in working to get this small but important piece of legislation passed.

I named the legislation the PRECAUTION Act because I know that it is far better to invest in precautionary measures now than it is to pay later the costs of crime--a cost borne not only in dollars but in lives. We have mourned the loss of far too many innocent lives already. Furthermore, David Kennedy, Director of the Center for Crime Prevention and Control at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, reported in an August 2006 Washington Post article that, "state and local officials feel abandoned by the federal government. . . The federal government must return to its role as a real partner in conquering crime by providing funding and crafting effective approaches to key problems." Something must be done at the federal level to stem the tide of violence threatening our nation. Put very simply, we, as representatives of our constituents, have an obligation to act.

Thank you again, Senator Biden, for holding this important hearing and for providing a forum where we can begin to address the growing problem of crime in our communities.