

Statement of  
**The Honorable Dianne Feinstein**

United States Senator  
California  
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Statement of Senator Dianne Feinstein  
at a Hearing before the Senate Judiciary Committee's  
Subcommittee on Crime and Drugs: "Rising Crime in the U.S.: Examining the Federal Role in  
Helping Communities Respond to Violent Crime"

I thank Chairman Biden for holding this hearing on an issue that is at the core of this subcommittee's jurisdiction - keeping Americans safe from violent crime.

Unfortunately, the news is not good. Last June, the FBI reported that its statistics in 2005 showed a 2.3% one-year rise in violent crime - our worst violent crime surge in almost 15 years. Putting this number in human terms, the International Association of Chiefs of Police estimates that the FBI's 2005 statistics meant that 31,479 more Americans were murdered, raped, assaulted or otherwise subject to violent crime in 2005 than in 2004.

Since then, the news unfortunately has only gotten worse. In December, the FBI revealed that violent crime in the first half of 2006 rose by 3.7% - 50% higher than in 2005. And violent crime and murder grew fastest in our mid-sized and smaller cities - not our largest urban areas.

We do not yet have FBI statistics for the rest of 2006. But a recent Police Executive Research Forum (PERF) survey of jurisdictions estimated that, since January 1, 2005, homicides, robberies and assaults with a firearm have all gone up at least 10%. At least 2/3 of jurisdictions reported a rise in each of these categories, with violent crime up by 20-30% in many cities. In just two years.

No wonder several witnesses will be talking today about a crisis when it comes to violent crime in America.

#### Gang Violence as the Cause

Of course, a big part of this crisis stems from gang violence. The warnings we have received about the links between these increases in violent crime and the spread of criminal street gangs have been steady and consistent.

When the FBI announced its 2005 figures last June, the Washington Post noted how criminal justice experts identified "an influx of gangs into medium-sized cities" as a big reason for this increase. According to the Los Angeles Times, Houston police attributed their 2005 increase to gang members who evacuated New Orleans after Katrina.

When its 2006 figures were announced, criminologists like James Alan Fox, who will testify here today, were quoted in the Washington Post as saying that "[w]e have many high-crime areas where gangs have made a comeback." And the LA Times noted how "[e]xperts said the crime upsurge reflected an increase in gang violence, particularly in midsized cities." Cities like Houston, which experienced a massive 28% increase in violent crime.

And even in places with a reduction in violent crime - such as Los Angeles, which has moved into the ranks of the safest cities in the U.S. - Mayor Villaraigosa described gang violence as the "glaring exception." In 2006, gang crime was up by 15% in L.A. - up more than 40% in San Fernando Valley. 57% of Los Angeles' 478 homicides for 2006 were attributed to gangs. And 86% of those murder victims were African-American or Latino.

Every year, we see more shocking and horrifying tales of gang murders of beautiful children, like 14-year old Cheryl Green, killed because of the color of her skin, 9-year old Charupa Wongwisetsiri, killed when a drive-by bullet penetrated her kitchen wall, and Kaitlin Avila, a 3-year old child intentionally shot in the chest by a gang member who killed her father and didn't want a witness.

Nationwide, the FBI has identified at least 30,000 gangs, with 800,000 members. The FBI estimates that gangs are having an impact on at least 2,500 communities across the nation.

These criminal street gangs engage in drug trafficking, robbery, extortion, gun trafficking, and murder. They destroy neighborhoods, cripple families and kill innocent people. Our national gang problem is immense and growing, and it is not going away. Our cities and states need our help - a long-term federal commitment to combat gang violence.

#### The Feinstein-Hatch Gang Bill

In January, I joined Senator Hatch in introducing the Gang Abatement and Prevention Act. This comprehensive legislation is tough on crime - it adopts new federal criminal laws and tougher penalties and improves witness protection.

But it's also tough on the root causes of crime - identifying successful community programs, and then investing significant resources in schools and civic and religious organizations to prevent our young people from ever joining gangs in the first place.

I am pleased that this bill, S.456, has received letters of support from many organizations, including several whose representatives are appearing for this hearing today, or will be providing written testimony for the record:

- ? The International Association of Chiefs of Police;
- ? The National Sheriffs Association;
- ? The National Association of Police Organizations;
- ? The U.S. Conference of Mayors;
- ? The Police Foundation;
- ? The National District Attorneys Association
- ? The Fraternal Order of Police;
- ? The Major Cities Chiefs Association;

? The National Narcotics Officers Associations Coalition;  
? The Federal Law Enforcement Officers Association;  
? The International Union of Police Associations (AFL-CIO);  
? The National Troopers Coalition  
? The National Black Police Association, Inc.;  
? The National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives;  
? The Hispanic American Police Command Officers Association;  
? The National Latino Peace Officers Association;  
? The National Association of Women Law Enforcement Officers;  
? The International Association of Women Police;  
? The National Major Gang Task Force;  
? The National Gang Investigators Association;  
? The California Gang Investigators Association;  
? The Florida Gang Investigators Association;  
? California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger;  
? California Attorney General Edmund G. Brown, Jr.  
? The California Peace Officers' Association;  
? The League of California Cities;  
? Los Angeles Mayor Antonio R. Villaraigosa  
? The County of Los Angeles;  
? The Bakersfield City Council;  
? The Sonoma County District Attorney's Office;  
? The San Bernardino Sheriffs' Office;  
? Boys & Girls Clubs of America;  
? The National Mentoring Partnership,  
? The Points of Light Foundation, and  
? The Advancement Project.

For the past decade, Senator Hatch and I have been trying to pass federal gang legislation. Unfortunately, while Congress has failed to act, violent street gangs have only expanded nationwide and become more empowered and entrenched in other states and communities.

It is past time for the federal government to come to grips with our escalating levels of gang violence. I thank Chairman Biden for holding this hearing, and I hope it will assist Congress in moving forward this legislation.