

Testimony of
Colonel Rick S. Gregory

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Chief of Police, New Castle County, DE
Judiciary Committee

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Chairman Biden, Senator Specter, distinguished members and my fellow law enforcement professionals, thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I am Rick Gregory, Chief of Police for the New Castle County Police Department in Delaware. Prior to my appointment in New Castle County, I was a member of the Florida Highway Patrol where I served for 22 ½ years rising through the ranks to my last position as lieutenant colonel where I served as a deputy director of field operations.

In October 2006, I was presented with the opportunity to lead the second largest police department and the pioneer agency for community policing in the State of Delaware. Our agency consists of 364 officers covering 426 square miles with a population of more than 450,000 citizens. During 2006, our officers responded to, or handled approximately 162,000 calls for service. For the year 2007, we will surpass that mark considering that we have handled 82,000 calls for service year to date.

Our federally funded sworn officer positions have gone from a high of 15 in 2000, primarily funded by the COPS grants, down to our current low of three. I speak to you today not as a representative of a small struggling agency barely able to keep its head above water, but as a flagship agency of a county that consistently receives triple AAA bond ratings. Despite this bright economic and enviable position, our county has been operating at a deficit since 2003. We are currently spending down our reserve and expect to deplete that by 2009 unless radical measures are adopted. Our County leadership proposed a 17% property tax increase which will help our situation, but only delays the inevitable. If a county with our economic status and forecast is facing such harsh measures... what is to become of the already struggling public safety agencies without continued support from our federal partners?

Recently, our local newspaper featured articles that described the Homeland Security dollars being spent on equipment in our state. While this equipment is valuable and necessary, it is important that we do not lose sight of the ultimate weapon in combating crime and terrorism - the officer on the street. An expensive piece of equipment cannot fill the dual role of crime fighter and homeland security defender. Furthermore, without a front line police officer to work with these marvelous pieces of technology their value is significantly reduced and/or eliminated.

Earlier I mentioned that we are arguably the largest agency in the state dedicated to the tenets of community policing. Community policing is about interfacing our officers with the people that live and work in the communities we police. Without this interface, we as a police agency lose touch with the citizens we have sworn to protect. Effective community policing requires that officers have time to spend in communities getting to know who belongs there, who doesn't, what is out of place, what is working and so much more. Finding the time to get our officers in these communities is one of our greatest battles.

Recently, we have become predominately "a call for service" driven agency. By that I mean, our officers spend the bulk of their time responding from one 911 call to the next. This is not effective community policing. Given our current financial state, it is unlikely that our agency will be allowed to grow without the assistance of federal funding. Without that ability and our already lowered capability to get into our communities in an effective community policing - problem solving style, we will struggle to deal with the increase in violent crime activity - the latest national trend.

In our County, we are seeing a level of violence such as, the armed robbery of a pizza delivery person, as commonplace criminal acts. From 2005 to 2006, we saw a 38% increase in robberies. This type of crime has made violence impersonal and second nature to many offenders. People are shot for reasons as trivial as being on the wrong street, or saying the wrong thing. We must curb this growing trend in violent crimes, with declining federal resources for police personnel.

A recent article in The USA Today entitled Youth Gangs Contribute to Rising Crime Rates (5-15-2007) stated, "increasing violence among teenagers and other youths appears to have contributed to a nationwide crime spike..." This trend is only the beginning of what is sure to continue for the indefinite future.

We in Delaware and specifically, New Castle County, are not immune from this national trend. Last summer one of our communities was bombarded with gang violence that eventually led to a full-scale brawl between rival gangs. This devastating encounter resulted in one person being killed by a handgun, one person shot and one person stabbed. Twelve subjects were arrested for this battle and of those twelve, six were juveniles. When considering this homicide and the comments from the USA Today, remember that we are discussing juveniles with weapons. Firearms in the hands of adults are deadly, but consider firearms in the hands of an immature, gangster want to be - at the ripe age of 13.

The successful investigation and prosecution of this case was, in large part, due to the expertise offered by our federally funded gang officer. The federal funding for this officer from the Edward Byrne Memorial Fund, allows us to dedicate an officer to the growing problem of gangs and gang violence. Additionally, federal money spent on the community crime intervention program allows us to dedicate a Spanish-speaking officer to a troubled community with Hispanic gang influences. Together these officers provide invaluable intelligence on gangs in our communities. Without this federally funded expertise, this brutal crime may have gone unsolved.

Many of these juveniles start their life of delinquency as runaways. From 2002 through 2006 our agency saw a 22% increase in the number of juvenile runaways. I refer you back to the recent

USA Today in which the Department of Justice comments on runaways "Many youths have little parental oversight and are too easily influenced by gang membership and glamorized violence in popular culture." It is well documented that the most indicative common denominator for predicting juvenile delinquency and juvenile victimization are juveniles with a history of running away. This in effect is a 22% increase in the number of kids primed for recruiting by gangs and the gang culture.

In September 2006, Mr. Jim Kane, Director of the Delaware Criminal Justice Council testified before Senator Specter and Senator Biden and touched on a federally funded initiative that is working effectively. I will not spend time on the same points as Mr. Kane, but it is important to restate the programs that work so effectively, and "Operation Safe Streets" is one such program. Since June of 2006, the New Castle County Police has collaborated with the State of Delaware's Department of Corrections Probation and Parole officers for the purpose of targeting two-time violent felons and preventing future crimes. For the period June 2006 through February 2007, this small four-person unit seized 82 firearms, a pound of crack cocaine, over three pounds of marijuana, almost 5 grams of heroin, 47 grams of methamphetamine, nearly a pound of PCP, apprehended 141 fugitives, conducted 1841 curfew checks, and seized over \$30,00.00 in illegal proceeds.

In Delaware, the Safe Streets program is a collaborative effort involving the four largest police agencies and the Department of Corrections. Combined federal money in support of this program is close to one million dollars. Money spent on ventures such as this are truly effective weapons in the everyday battle to reduce or contain violent crime. Expanded measures in this regard remove repeat offenders from our communities and free up time for our officers to return to the job of community policing.

With that, I come to my plea. The expansion of programs such as Safe Streets, gang officers and community crime intervention officer, allows a small number of officers to have a magnified and directed impact on communities that most need our help. In addition, their efforts serve to rid the communities of repeat offenders, which frees up the officer on the street to spend more time in their communities working to break this increasing cycle of violence. While these positions are of great value, their longevity is limited due to the funding source. Byrne money, which funds these positions, is an excellent resource, but it is not a suitable device for hiring officers. COPS money, with its three-year hiring grant is a better funding source for stability reasons. Federal money spent on these proven successful endeavors is money well spent on the security of our communities.

Thank you again for the opportunity to address this committee and to take a few moments to explain how much we in state and local law enforcement, rely on federal funding to accomplish our mission.