

Testimony of
The Honorable Charles E. Schumer

December 5, 2001

Mr. Chairman, in 1994 the Crime Bill created the COPS on the Beat Program. As Chairman of the House Subcommittee on Crime, I helped to shepherd this program through Congress because I believed then - and I believe now - that Congress should promote the spread of policing strategies that prevent crime before it occurs, rather than simply reacting to crime.

Given the new focus on terrorism that the Department of Justice is rightfully taking as a result of the September 11th attacks, it is more important than ever that local law enforcement has the resources that it needs to address crimes in our communities.

And, it is particularly important in these tough financial times - when state and local budgets are particularly tight - that the federal government not cut back on our support of local law enforcement at the same time that federal law enforcement is turning to other pressing issues. For both of these reasons, and because of the dramatic success of the program, I believe that we must continue the COPS program and the federal government's commitment to community policing.

By the end of last year, the COPS program had awarded grants for the hiring or redeployment to the nation's streets of over 100,000 police officers and sheriff's deputies. It is estimated that by the end of this year, over 84,000 of these officers will be on the street.

The COPS partnership with state and local law enforcement has been paying big dividends. According to the 2000 Uniform Crime Reports from the FBI, the number of serious crimes is far below where it was five and ten years ago - down 14 percent from 1996 and 22 percent from 1991. In fact, the 2000 measure was the lowest since 1978.

The number of murders are also significantly lower than they were five and ten years ago - 21 percent from 1996 and 37.2 percent from 1991. And, property crime rates in 2000 were lower as well - 13.8 percent lower than 1996 and 21.4 percent lower than 1991.

In my home state of New York, since 1994, violent crime has dropped 40 percent. Murder is down 51 percent, aggravated assault is down nearly 29 percent and robbery is down 52 percent.

Crime is down from one end of the state to the other. The city of Albany saw a 20 percent drop in crime and Binghamton saw an 8% drop. There was a 26% drop in Buffalo, a 38% drop in New York City, a 21% drop in Rochester, and a 22.5% drop in Syracuse.

A study from the University of Nebraska has shown that the drop in the crime rate is due in no small part to the COPS program. They found a direct correlation in cities receiving COPS grants

between the decline in both violent and property crimes and the receipt of COPS dollars. I am pleased that Professor Solomon Zhao from the University is here to discuss his study, and I look forward to hearing more about his findings.

The research findings are supported by the observations of the experts and everyday citizens with direct experience with the COPS program. They will tell you that enhanced community policing has played a significant role. Police officers develop an intimate knowledge of the communities they patrol, in the process discovering what community conditions give rise to criminal behavior. In turn, the community sees familiar faces patrolling their streets and ultimately develops the trust that breeds joint efforts to solve local problems.

We must continue this successful program that has done so much to eradicate crime in this nation. I am sure that many of my colleagues have heard, as I have, from police chiefs, rank-and-file officers, mayors, city councils, and town boards about how important it is to continue the COPS program. In fact, I understand that we will hear from several of these local law enforcement officers today about their successes under the COPS program.

They are the ones who have used the program to expand their police forces even in the face of increasingly tight local budgets. They are the ones who most clearly understand the link between a strong community policing presence and safe streets.

In closing, I would like to thank Senator Biden for holding this hearing today to highlight this important crime prevention program. And, I would also like to note that I am a co-sponsor of S. 924, the bill that Senator Biden introduced to re-authorize this important program. The COPS program has been - and should continue to be - a significant part of our successful strategy to roll back crime.