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Senator Byron L. Dorgan
U.S. Senate Democratic Policy Committee
322 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Senator Dorgan:

I understand from Nick Bath that you will be holding hearings on the relationship between the recent UCR reports of the crime increases in 2005 and the concern over the major reductions in Federal support for the variety of crime-related programs such as the Byrne grants and the COPS program. I appreciate your invitation to testify, but I had a prior commitment to a meeting here in Pittsburgh that prevents me from joining you. I would, however, like to convey my concerns and my perspectives in this letter, and hope this is helpful in your consideration of this important issue.

It is well known that the US experienced a very satisfying crime drop in the 1990s. From 1993 to 2000, the rates of homicide and robbery, the two most serious and well measured violent crimes, declined by over 40 percent, bringing us to levels of these crimes (under 6 homicides per 100,000 population and under 150 robberies per 100,000) that had not been seen since the 1960s. Some documentation of these changes is covered in the latest edition of our book, *The Crime Drop in America* (Alfred Blumstein and Joel Wallman, eds., Cambridge University Press, 2006), a copy of which is being sent under separate cover to the committee.

National crime rates from 2000 to 2004 as reported by the FBI's Uniform Crime Reports have been impressively flat. That does not imply that all places had flat rates – indeed, there was considerable local variation – but rather that the places with increasing crime rates roughly balanced those with decreasing rates. The preliminary report for 2005 issued on June 12, 2006, however, represents the first significant departure from that flat trend. We saw a 4.8 percent increase in murder and a 4.5 percent increase in robbery. Interestingly, these increases were concentrated not in the largest cities, but rather in the smaller cities: murder rates increased by more than 12 percent in cities of 50,000 to 250,000 and more than 9 percent in cities of 250,000 to 500,000. Robberies increased by 10 percent in cities of 500,000 to 1,000,000.

Here again, it should be clear that these increases were not uniform in these city groupings, but that a limited number of cities had particularly large increases, and those drove the changes for the group. Some examples of those large increases in murder, for

example, include Birmingham (up 76 percent), Milwaukee (up 40 percent), St. Louis (up 51 percent), Cleveland (up 38 percent), Houston (up 23 percent), Kansas City, MO (up 42 percent), Jersey City (up 66 percent), and Norfolk (up 66 percent).

In most cases, these large increases were attributable to distinctive phenomena in each of these cities rather than to some common national trend. But it is also clear that there are some troublesome national patterns that could be contributing to these places, some of which are of direct concern to the Federal government.

I haven't investigated the factors associated with the cities with the large increases, but my hunch is that in many cases the large increases are associated with competition or dispute resolution in newly activated drug markets, gang warfare, or widespread presence of guns in the hands of people who shouldn't have them – young males who use them for responding to small insults. In all of these cases, cycles of retaliation between groups are likely to contribute to a major increase in violence. Otherwise, the diffuse nature of most homicides is not likely to lead to increases of 25 percent or more.

Overriding these large changes are the factors that could be contributing to a slower rate of increase, but such increases are likely to be more widespread, and could be more serious in the long run. This is the general withdrawal of support for a variety of services to police and to the criminal justice system more broadly. We have seen many city police budgets cut in recent years. This has been exacerbated by the major reductions in COPS funding, which a recent GAO study gave some credit for the crime drop of the 1990s. We have seen a reduction in Byrne funding, which has been an important factor contributing to innovation and steady improvement in national policing efforts and more broadly throughout the criminal-justice system. An important part of the success of the 1990s crime drop has been attributed to policing efforts to take guns away from people who shouldn't have them, to do tracing of those guns to find major sources of distribution, and such efforts have also been hampered by recent legislation.

More broadly, we have seen major reductions in social services delivered by state and local governments, and much of those reductions are attributable to reduction in Federal funding for those services. Obviously, the recipients of those services are those in the more disadvantaged communities, and those are the communities that also give rise to much criminal offending.

There are many other trends in our communities that could be contributing to a rise in crime and violence. These include declining job opportunities for young people with minimal education, diversion of police from regular policing to responding to real or false terror threats. All of these factors could be contributing to a crime rise now and in the future.

At this point, it is too early to know whether the 2005 increase is the start of a broader and more lasting increase in violence. It is also too early to identify the causes of the 2005 increase. But it is not too early to recognize that the Federal support for the wide array of crime-reduction, crime-control, and crime-prevention efforts have been

important in keeping under control the many forces within our society that drive crime and violence up -- and that the major reductions in those crime-control efforts are likely to reduce those restraining factors and induce much more crime in the future. And we know that the political response to any such increase is likely to lead to major efforts at increasing incarceration, which will be far more expensive than these efforts at keeping crime under control.

Thus, I would encourage you in these hearings and beyond to provide strong support for limiting these cutbacks and for restoring the programs that have been so important over the years.

I appreciate your invitation to testify and regret that I will not be able to join you personally at the hearings, and appreciate your willingness to accept this letter as a substitute. To give you some background information on me, I am enclosing a short biographical statement.

At your request, I would be pleased to elaborate on any of the statements in this letter or to respond to any questions you may have.

Yours truly,



Alfred Blumstein