

Statement for the Record of Senator Russell D. Feingold

DPC Oversight Hearing on Reduced Federal Funding For Law Enforcement and the Rise in Violent Crime

Monday, July 10, 2006

I am pleased that this hearing is drawing attention to the critically important issue of federal funding for state and local law enforcement agencies. Especially in light of new statistics that indicate an overall increase in crime rates across the country, it is important for Congress to examine carefully the funding we provide to federal grant programs. I appreciate the valuable insights of all the members of the panel who have traveled to Washington to testify, especially that of Brian O'Keefe, the Deputy Chief of the Milwaukee Police Department in my home state of Wisconsin.

Congress, in partnership with states and local communities, has an obligation to provide the tools, technology and training that our nation's law enforcement officers need to protect our communities. I have consistently supported a number of federal grant programs, including the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Program, which is instrumental in providing funding to train new officers and to purchase crime-fighting technologies. I also have long supported funding for the Byrne Grant Program, which provides funding to help fight violent and drug-related crime in a variety of ways, including support for multi-jurisdictional drug task forces, drug courts, drug education and prevention programs, and many other efforts to reduce drug abuse and prosecute drug offenders. These programs have been very important to Wisconsin law enforcement efforts, in particular with regard to fighting the spread of methamphetamine abuse.

Recently, I have started hearing from law enforcement officers in my state that they are concerned about an increase in the crime rates in their communities. And they are not alone. The FBI has recently released figures that indicate that nationwide, violent crime increased 2.5 percent between 2004 and 2005. And in the Midwest, violent crime between 2004 and 2005 increased 5.7 percent. Yet, while all of this is going on in communities across the country, and law enforcement agencies are tirelessly fighting crime, the current Administration has over the past five years consistently pushed to cut critical funding that helps state and local officials in this battle.

I welcome input from law enforcement officials across the country, in addition to those testifying at this hearing, on how Congress can aid this fight against crime in our communities. But a first step in combating crime must be to

stop pulling the rug out from under our state and local law enforcement agencies and restore – or at the very least stop slashing – the funding that they need. The police chiefs, county sheriffs and other officers I have spoken to over the years have been very clear on this point. Adequate federal funding for COPS and Byrne and other such programs is essential to the function, stability and success of police departments across Wisconsin and across the country.