

Senate Democratic Policy Committee Hearing
**“An Oversight Hearing on Reduced Federal Funding For
Law Enforcement and the Rise in Violent Crime”**

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July 10, 2006

May I first express my sincere thanks to Senator Dorgan, as well as the distinguished members of this committee, and all in attendance for the opportunity to address a matter that I personally believe to be of the utmost importance to the citizens that I have been sworn to serve. I am fortunate to be here today representing the citizens of Flint. The City of Flint recently celebrated its Sesquicentennial this past year. It is noteworthy that Flint was the birthplace of General Motors and the automotive industry that you know today. During our productive history we have transformed from a small village along the Flint River to become a city that flourished with economic development as the automotive industry prospered throughout the 20th century. Unfortunately, recent decades have dramatically changed the social and economic conditions of this city of great character and resilience.

City Demographics

Based on the 2000 U.S. Census the City of Flint was comprised of 124,943 residents. Data for 2004 indicates that the population had reduced to 119,716 residents. Unfortunately our population base continues to decrease as industrial jobs continue to leave the City of Flint and its citizens attempt to find new forms of employment. The average household income in Flint is only \$28,015, which is only 62 percent of the average Michigan household income of \$44,667. U.S. Census data indicates that 26 percent of the residents of the City of Flint live below the poverty level, which is significantly greater than the current national poverty level of 12 percent. This demonstrates that City of Flint residents are struggling to afford the additional tax burdens necessary to support the police services necessary to provide a safe environment for all. According to recently compiled FBI statistics, the Flint Journal was quoted in an October, 19, 2005 publication with a headline that read “Violent Crimes up 50 percent.” The article went on to state the City of Flint’s violent crime rate was 1,926 per 100,000 people which placed the City of Flint second in the nation in cities of 100,000 or more inhabitants.

An Era of Deindustrialization

It has been said as goes General Motors so goes the City of Flint. Today, we are dealing with the retraction of the U.S. economy and the automotive industry's decline. We have evolved from a geographic area that once had in excess of 70,000 automotive related jobs to one that only retains approximately 13,000 automotive related jobs and that number is decreasing annually. At one time a General Motors job or one related to the automotive industry was nearly guaranteed for every high school graduate that was inclined to enter the automotive industry. Today, the youth of the City of Flint have to face one of the highest unemployment rates in the United States. As jobs decrease so does the tax base that supports the funding for city services, including law enforcement. We have moved from a police department that once employed nearly 350 sworn law enforcement officers to one that now employs approximately 263 sworn law enforcement officers. Violent crimes in my city are on the increase, at a time when federal funding is decreasing, while the government asks us to be more vigilant in our participation with Homeland Security.

Crime Data and Recent Headline Cases

In 1999 the Flint Police Department employed 338 sworn Police Officers. Between 2001 and 2002 the City of Flint suffered from a major financial deficit. Because of this deficit, layoffs occurred within the Flint Police Department. These layoffs reduced the department's total number of sworn police officers to 237. This resulted in a 30 percent decrease in the number of sworn police officers. Along with the reduction of sworn police officers there was a decrease in support personnel as well. This created a situation where sworn police officers were performing clerical level tasks that took away from their time spent on police work. Between 1996 and 2001 the Federal Government funded between 17 to 34 sworn police officer positions within the Flint Police Department per year. In 2002 the Federal Government funded 12 sworn police officer positions within the Flint Police Department.

After this year the Federal Government will no longer be providing funding for sworn police officers for the Flint Police Department. Please keep in mind according to the Uniform Crime Report in 1999 the City of Flint reported 3096 violent crimes and the total number of sworn police officers for 1999 was 338. This represents an average of 9.2 violent crimes per officer. In 2005 the City of Flint reported 2760 violent crimes and the total number of sworn police officers for 2005 was 249. This represents an average of 11.1 violent crimes per officer, which is an 18 percent increase in violent crimes per officer. During this time the national average of violent crimes decreased yet the City of Flint violent crime rate per officer dramatically increased. It is hard to judge these statistics without more empirical data yet these statistics cannot be ignored. I believe there is a direct correlation between the number of officers on the street and violent crime. The Flint Police Department is striving to utilize the resources available to us in the best way it can to combat crime. An example of this is the Flint Police Department's Crime Area Target Team (CATT), which is comprised of approximately 18 sworn police officers and 3 police supervisors. The CATT team was designed to be simultaneously a

problem oriented policing team, crime prevention team, community organizing team and a juvenile crime suppression team. The team's mission is to assist neighborhoods in reducing conditions that create crime and disorder in a substantive and permanent manner. One of the CATT team's primary resources of information is from the community. Between January 2005 and May 2006, the CATT team has made 2513 felony arrests, 3051 misdemeanor arrests, recovered \$208,371.00 of illegal narcotics, seized \$173,953.00 in cash as forfeiture and recovered 210 illegal firearms. Much of the success of this unit can be related directly to the community providing information and feedback on the crimes that are occurring in their neighborhoods to the CATT team and Community Policing Officers (CPO).

Recently Dr. Charles A. Brawner III, a professor of Criminal Justice Studies, as well as a publisher and consultant to the Flint Police Department was quoted as saying, "In order to be successful crime-fighters, today's police departments must view the citizen as a co-producer of police services. Citizens can provide the police with invaluable information to solve crimes. Be they paid informants, snooping neighbors, or just ordinary people concerned with the quality-of-life in their neighborhood, no one can disagree that the concept of community policing has expanded the access of communications between the police and citizens. Arguably, a lack of funding for local law enforcement could jeopardize the improved atmosphere of communications between the citizen and police that has helped solve crime and target potential criminal activities."

Dr. Brawner went on to emphasize that "community partnerships built upon the COPS funding throughout the 1990's should serve today to assist in developing intelligence information for our nation's proactive battle against terrorism. Homeland Security and COPS should not be viewed as separate entities, but rather as potential collaborating bodies for gathering intelligence at the street (local) level in the war against terrorism."

His words are insightful, given the recently rising violent crimes within the City of Flint, during a time of decreased federal funding which threatens the public safety of our citizens. With additional sworn police officers on the streets of Flint, we could increase the number of officers to target those areas and suspects that are responsible for the rise in violent crime and thus save lives.

Accused killers of 3 left note taunting police

Publication: Flint Journal, The (MI)

Date: May 11, 2006

Page: A03

Record Id: 0413852441

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Green and Catherine Wedlow were found shot in the head at point-blank range Jan. 27 in their York Avenue residence ... Two days later and only eight blocks away, Robert Vondrasek was found with a fractured skull, eight knives embedded in his back, a slashed throat and 14 other stab wounds ... His E. Russell Avenue home was set on fire, leaving behind his charred

body - and a taunting note to police ... "Dear 911. You will never (k)now its me. 22-cal killer,"...

1 man dies in 2 shootings, one at a gas station

Publication: Flint Journal, The (MI)
Date: May 12, 2006
Page: A07
Record Id: 0413854866
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A man was shot to death just after midnight near the gas pumps at a W. Pasadena Avenue Sunoco service station ..Police investigating the shooting were interrupted about an hour later when a man drove up and told them he had just been shot in the back a few blocks away ... Officers were called to the Sunoco about 12:17 a.m. today and found the body of Tony A. Walton, 21, near a gas pump ... A Sunoco worker said he didn't hear any kind of argument before gunfire erupted...

Separate shootings kill man, leave teen near death

Publication: Flint Journal, The (MI)
Date: May 15, 2006
Page: A06
Record Id: 0413860197
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A 20-year-old Flint man was shot to death early Sunday .. In a second incident, a Flint teen is being kept alive by artificial means and is expected to die after being shot early Sunday .. One suspect is in custody in connection with the teen's shooting .. According to a statement released by Sgt. Lee Ann Gaspar, Terrell Johnson, 16, was found unconscious by officers when they were called to the driveway of a business on Dwight Avenue near Lippincott Boulevard after he was...

Response to Citizen Needs

Maintaining the commitment of residents in the City of Flint to combating violent crime in our community has definitely been challenging since the reduction of federal funding in recent years. With federal funding cuts, the rising problem of violent crime in our community has been left to our state and local government to solve. Finding revenue sources to combat this violent crime problem has been complicated with the decreased State revenues flowing to local communities not to mention the declining population and subsequent tax base erosion the City has faced in recent years. The residents of the City of Flint have also recognized the seriousness of the violent crime problem our City is facing. In seeking solutions to the problem the residents of our city demonstrated overwhelming support of the Flint Police Department's community based policing programs in March of 2006, when they approved a 2-mill millage request to keep 40 officers working in our neighborhoods by 92 percent. This 92 percent voter approval speaks volumes to the fact that the citizens of the City of Flint want to feel safe in their neighborhoods by having a police presence.

Call for Funding

We are constantly being asked to do more with less. The Federal Government asks us to be vigilant in investigating Homeland Security issues and in gathering intelligence both of which are time consuming endeavors. I believe that we have reached our saturation point. We cannot continue to take on additional responsibilities without supplementary funding sources for police personnel and equipment. I would charge that critics of community policing and COPS funding have not had first hand experience with the violence and death found upon the streets of some of our most crime ridden cities. Hence, a call for renewed funding to assist those urban areas facing potentially rising crime rates only makes sense. Citizens of the City of Flint have stepped up to the plate by maintaining funding through millage proposals. The citizens of Flint cannot continue to shoulder the burden alone and we are asking the Federal Government to step up to the plate and assist us in making our streets a place where children can play and our residents can feel safe.

Closing Comment

Senators, people are dying in the City of Flint! I ask your support in restoring funding to programs that support law enforcement jobs and equipment. We need the funds to save the lives of our citizens and to make the streets safe for our children.

I want to thank you again for having me here today and for investigating this important matter.