

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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Good afternoon Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee. My name is Ted Kamatchus and I currently serve as the Sheriff of Marshall County, Iowa and President of the National Sheriffs’ Association. I am pleased to have this opportunity to appear before you today to express my concerns, and what I know to be the concerns of Sheriffs across the country with the continued reduction in federal assistance available to state and local law enforcement particularly the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant and COPS programs.

Background

Most recently, we have seen an increase of violent crime across this country. FBI statistics show that violent crime in 2005 increased at 2.5 percent, most noticeably in mid-sized cities and in the Midwest. And on a regional basis, the increase disproportionately hit the Midwest area, including my home state of Iowa. In Iowa we are reporting a 5.7 percent increase, which is three times the rate in the Northeast, South or West. Overall, this marks the largest annual increase since 1991.

Mr. Chairman, as NSA President, I represent the Sheriffs of this country. My interest is for the country as a whole, border to border, coast to coast. That in mind, you will find a chart that I have submitted in your packet. According to this chart prepared by the North Carolina Governor’s Crime Commission, there is a statistically significant correlation between Office of Justice Programs (OJP) funding levels and reported crime as measured by the FBI’s Uniform Crime Report (UCR) Index. It illustrates that OJP allocation for justice programs, which includes state and local assistance and COPS programs, escalated from 1995 to 2000 then began a downward shift in 2001. In 2004, the funding level plummeted by over \$1 billion compared to the 1996 level which was at \$4.1 billion. Simply, OJP funding levels and reported crime statistics show an inverse relationship.

In the early 1990’s Congress joined in a partnership with law enforcement to provide assistance in federal funds for hiring additional officers and deputies to put

offenders behind bars, and fight the war on drugs through the Byrne and COPS programs. The 1994 Crime Bill begins with “Strategies to Assist State and Local Governments in Providing an Immediate Response to Crime” through grants to combat violent crimes and put more police on the streets. I am amazed that those same people who supported us then, seem to have walked away as if the problem could never happen again. But, now today, we are faced with a spike in violent crime and rampant drug abuse, illegal sales and trafficking.

Over the past ten years I have been on the forefront of this battle — a battle in the streets against drug dealers and the battle to convince Congress that the need to assist states and locals in this “war on drugs” continues to exist. The “war on drugs” may have a history as a term of endearment or mere political rhetoric for some but to a person who lays his or her life on the line, it is a harsh reminder of reality. The reality is that we simply do not have the necessary federal support to fight the war on drugs and sweep the streets of criminals.

For more than 30 years, Byrne grants have funded state and local drug task forces, community crime prevention programs, substance abuse treatment programs, prosecution initiatives, and many other local crime control and prevention programs. We perceive this program as the underpinning of federal aid for local law enforcement. Continued reduction in Byrne funding will undoubtedly obliterate the successes that we have all helped to achieve. There must be a balancing of roles between federal, state and local governments. Crime control may primarily be a state and local responsibility, but we must not forget that crime is a national problem. The correlation shown in the earlier graph clearly shows this to be true.

Current Emerging Trends and Impact

Since 2003, my office in Marshalltown, Iowa has suffered major setbacks due to drastic reduction in Byrne-JAG and COPS programs. In an effort to deal with reduced funding, we have shifted local dollars, strategy and manpower in an effort to keep many of our programs alive.

While my home state of Iowa has made headway combating the methamphetamine epidemic due in part to its tough state law in controlling pseudoephedrine as well as persistent enforcement, we continue to see methamphetamine — in the form of crystal meth or “ice” which is a purer form and more potent form of methamphetamine — smuggled into Iowa from Mexico. Shipments of marijuana, cocaine and heroin are also originating from or shipped through Mexico. Just this past week, my agency interdicted over 200 pounds of high grade marijuana along with cocaine and mushrooms. These drugs were passing through our community headed for New York. These types of incidents are becoming more and more prevalent. Given the scope of this problem which transcends state and national borders, we need federal assistance to address this growing problem now more than ever.

As with many other states, Iowa is already feeling the brunt of reduced federal assistance in funding to programs in 2004 and 2005. Last year Iowa suffered a nearly 40 percent cut to Byrne-JAG funding across the state. Estimated funding cut to this program over the last two years have led to an approximately 30 percent reduction in arrest rates in Iowa.

In most states, Byrne-JAG funded drug enforcement task forces are the cornerstone of drug enforcement efforts. These task forces represent the ideal in law enforcement; pooling limited resources, sharing intelligence, strategically targeting a specific problem, and eliminating duplication of efforts. In a survey conducted by the Iowa Governor's Office of Drug Control Policy (ODCP) in February 2006, forty-six states reported funding multi-jurisdictional task forces through the Byrne-JAG program and thirty-nine states reported 2,794 drug task force personnel funded full time. This does not include figures from several of the larger states (Illinois, California, Pennsylvania and Texas) who spend a significant amount of grant funding on task forces. This also does not take into account the grant program's manpower multiplier effect which is a result of state and local agencies assigning locally funded officers, prosecutors and support staff to grant funded task forces.

Significant Accomplishments

Forty-five states reported a total of 221,475 drug arrests made by Byrne-JAG funded task force projects. That translates into many fewer victims. And participating states reported the total value of drugs seized at over \$12 billion representing more than \$63 in seized drugs for every one dollar spent on drug task forces. Thirty-seven states reported a total of nearly 9,000 methamphetamine clandestine laboratory responses. More than half of the states (24 out of 41 states) stated further reduction or elimination of the Byrne-JAG program would reduce or eliminate drug, gang or multi-jurisdictional task forces in their state.

Furthermore, as we consider the correlation between violent crime and the need for additional funding to support law enforcement activities, I would like you to consider the astonishing result by our law enforcement. Byrne-JAG funded drug task forces seized over 54,000 weapons just last year alone.

COPS Programs

COPS programs play an integral role in providing enhanced information technology (IT) systems that are vital to support community policing efforts. IT has been essential to crime-fighting since patrol cars got radios in the 1920s. And over the past decade, an increasing number of law enforcement agencies have relied on computer aided dispatch, records management, crime analysis, and other information technology system applications to help them better protect their communities.

For example, the interoperable communications program helps achieve an important goal – the ability to respond effectively to and mitigate incidents that require

the coordinated action of law enforcement and public safety officers. However, this program has also been slashed in the last two years. Technology grants currently provides 450 communities with up-to-date technologies and automated systems which aid law enforcement personnel to respond quicker, cover more ground, investigate and evaluate criminal activity.

I cannot emphasize enough the importance of COPS programs particularly in that funding for these programs are distributed directly to local law enforcement agencies – those that can best assess and allocate funds where they have the most impact.

Conclusion

I want to thank you for the opportunity to come before you and express my concerns. I hope I have conveyed to you the dire situation that Sheriffs are faced with across the country and how critical Byrne-JAG and COPS programs are to us. The strain on limited funds for law enforcement programs in the face of increasing violence and drug use in our communities ought to be a major inducement for government and law enforcement alike to share the responsibility for keeping our communities safe.

I speak to you today as the President of the National Sheriffs' Association. We are the largest law enforcement association in the country with 98% of our Sheriff members elected by the same constituents that elect the Congress and President of our country. We interact on a daily basis with that voting public and therefore see the direct impact that violent crime and drugs has on their families. I ask your full consideration on my comments today. Not just as a Sheriff, but as a representative of all law enforcement and as a citizen. I know that through your commitment and efforts together we can overcome these adversities.