



The Washington Report

The Newsletter of the National Association of Police Organizations

Representing America's Finest

June 10, 2013

NAPO WASHINGTON REPORT FLASH

Senate Appropriations Hearing on DOJ's FY 2014 Budget

On June 6, 2013, NAPO attended the Commerce, Justice and Science, and Related Agencies Subcommittee hearing on the Justice Department's FY 2014 budget. The hearing included testimonies from Attorney General Eric Holder and Department of Justice (DOJ) Inspector General Michael Horowitz. The following includes highlights from the hearing pertinent to NAPO:

- During her opening statements, Chairwoman Barbara Mikulski (D-MD) noted that the President's FY 2014 Budget Request includes \$27.6 billion for DOJ. Chairwoman Mikulski alluded to the COPS Hiring Program, as she explained the budget request includes funding to hire school safety personnel and train local police officers to respond to threats in the community. Vice Chairman Shelby (R-AL) noted that the FY 2014 budget request for DOJ is a 3.9% increase over FY 2013 enacted levels. He furthered that this includes funding for new gun control measures.
- Attorney General Holder stressed the following points during his testimony:
 - The President's Budget Request includes over \$4 billion for vital national security programs to respond to events, such as the Boston Marathon bombing.
 - DOJ remains committed to working with Members of Congress to secure the passage of common-sense measures for preventing and reducing gun violence, as well as comprehensive immigration reform.
 - DOJ is committed to safeguarding the most vulnerable members of society, and to investing in strategies to become smarter and tougher on crime. The President's Budget Request includes \$2.3 billion for state, local, and tribal assistance program, with a focus on funding evidence-based programs.
 - DOJ's ability to continue progress has been negatively impacted by sequestration, which cut over \$1.6 billion from the Department's budget for FY 2013. With the help of the Commerce, Justice and Science, and Related Agencies Subcommittee, DOJ provided \$150 million to the Bureau of Prisons to mitigate the effects of these reductions, and to avoid furloughing more than 3,500 correction staff each day from federal prisons around the country. Also, with the Subcommittee's support, DOJ was able to use similar authorities to provide necessary funding to the FBI and other components to prevent furloughs and maintain adequate operations. Attorney General Holder explained that these, and similar solutions, will no longer be available to alleviate FY 2014 shortfalls due to Joint Committee reductions. Passing the President's Budget will ensure that DOJ has the resources it needs to fulfill its mission.
- Chairwoman Mikulski discussed the need to address the growing federal prison population, while maintaining the safety of our communities and the guards who work in the prison system. (The federal prison budget makes up 25% of the entire DOJ budget). The Chairwoman explained her willingness to work with the Attorney General to implement more effective prevention and rehabilitation programs to reduce recidivism.

- Attorney General Holder explained that the President's Budget includes \$6.9 billion to run the prison system, which provides funding for 2,087 new positions. He furthered that resources must be focused on making re-entry, rehabilitation, and prevention programs more effective.
- Senator Dianne Feinstein (D-CA) explained that 58% of federal firearms dealers have not been inspected in the last five years. The President allocated \$51.1 million to enhance Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (ATF) enforcement programs and strengthen inspections.
 - Attorney General Holder responded that ATF has been resource starved for a number of years. It has also suffered due to a lack of Senate confirmed leadership. The American people will be safer if ATF receives its requested funding and Todd Jones is confirmed as the leader of the Bureau.
- Inspector General Horowitz noted that there are significant budget challenges in relation to the federal prison system. As DOJ's overall budget is shrinking, the prison population is growing. He furthered that we must address the aging prison population.
 - Inspector General Horowitz explained that the Compassionate Leave Program is an option to manage the prison population without increasing risk to the community. This program carefully selects individuals with low recidivism rates (approximately 3%), including the elderly, to be released from the prison system.
 - Additionally, thousands of inmates are eligible for the International Prisoners Transfer Program, where non-U.S. national, low-level offenders, are released to their home countries. Approximately 27% of current federal inmates are non-US nationals. If 3% of these individuals were sent back to their home countries, the U.S. Government would incur approximately \$50 million in savings.
- Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) discussed the Inspector General's interim report on DOJ's handling of known or suspected terrorists who were admitted to the Federal Witness Protection Program. These individuals are given new identities, which are not being shared with the Transportation Security Administration.
 - Inspector General Horowitz concurred with Senator Collins that these individuals have flown on commercial flights using their new identities, with the knowledge and permission of the U.S. Marshals Service, even though they would not be permitted to fly under their real identities. Two marshals escort the individuals to the plane and pick them up when they land, but they are not escorted during the flight. There is a possibility that these individuals could fly under their new identities without escorts, and while not on official business.
 - Senator Collins is going to work with the IG to address this issue.

If you have any questions about this hearing, please contact Melissa Nee at: mnee@napo.org.

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