

Testimony of Anthony F. Wieners
President, New Jersey State Policemen's Benevolent Association
Executive Board Member, National Association of Police Organizations
"Supporting the Front Line in the Fight Against Crime: Restoring Federal
Funding for State and Local Law Enforcement"
U.S. Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime and Drugs
Dirksen Senate Office Building, Room 226
February 27, 2008 2:00 p.m.

Good Afternoon Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Graham, and members of the Subcommittee. My name is Anthony Wieners and I am a Detective with the Belleville, New Jersey Police Department. I also serve as the President of the 33,000 member New Jersey State Policemen's Benevolent Association, and I am an Executive Board member of the National Association of Police Organizations (NAPO). NAPO represents approximately 238,000 sworn law enforcement officers throughout the United States.

The duty of every law enforcement officer in America is to serve and protect the people of our communities. As such, we need the manpower and tools to do our best to fight crime and, as a part of a national crime fighting strategy, we require the full support of the federal government now more than ever. I am here today because state and local law enforcement in America is being dangerously shortchanged. Our officers are being passed over for critical funding to assist them in combating and responding to crime and terrorism. Crime is on the rise and we need the resources to fight back now.

There are three issues that I will address this afternoon that are of increasing concern to the law enforcement community: the decrease in federal support for vital Department of Justice state and local law enforcement assistance programs since 2002; the additional duties taken on by local law enforcement agencies in the post-9/11 era; and finally, the recent increase in crime rates experienced by communities nationwide. These issues are interrelated and cannot be separated, particularly if we want to do something about the issue of rising violent crime rates in the United States.

The Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program and the Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grants (Byrne-JAG) program have given state and local law enforcement the necessary funding to significantly assist its efforts to keep our nation's communities safe. These justice assistance programs have contributed countless resources to help combat crime, from assisting with the hiring and retention of over 118,000 police officers to serve in local communities, to paying for overtime, equipment, training, and allowing for the development of intergovernmental task forces, as well as innovative partnerships to fight crime.

In 1994, Congress and the administration significantly strengthened state and local law enforcement in the fight against crime with the enactment of the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994. This law increased federal support for established state and local justice assistance programs and created the COPS program, which pledged to put 100,000 community police officers on our nation's streets. Since its enactment, the 1994 Crime Bill has

surpassed its goal. Federal support in funding and resources provided to state and local law enforcement was a key factor in the reduction of crime rates nationwide. Nevertheless, this success cannot now be used as an excuse to dismantle the programs that have proven to be effective in protecting our neighborhoods.

It is not a coincidence that community policing was at its best and national crime rates were at their lowest when federal support for programs such as COPS, the Byrne Memorial Fund, and Local Law Enforcement Block Grant was at its peak. It is also no coincidence that the steep reduction in federal support for these programs has been followed by increases in violent crime rates nationwide.

With the support of these federal grant programs, local law enforcement was the dominant force behind the dramatic reduction in crime this nation witnessed over the past fourteen years. In 2000, violent crime rates were at their lowest level in thirty years. As the Heritage Foundation recently noted, local law enforcement has more knowledge and intelligence about the criminals in their jurisdictions than their federal counterparts, making them an essential part of the national strategy to combat crime.¹

In fact, a December 2001 study by researchers at the University of Nebraska at Omaha found that the COPS program is directly linked to the historic drop in U.S. crime rates in the 1990s. The “More Cops = Less Crime” statistical analysis produced by Senator Biden, together with Congressman Anthony Weiner, provides further evidence to the link between the COPS grants funds and decreases in crime from 1995-2000.

According to the “More Cops = Less Crime” evaluation, the effects of the COPS grants from fiscal year 1994 to fiscal year 1999 on violent crime during that 1995-2000 period were substantial. During that time, approximately \$2 billion was provided nationally in hiring grants and over \$3.6 billion was provided in innovative grants to cities with populations over 10,000. Nationwide, police departments in these cities reported that violent crimes decreased by well over 150,000 incidents between 1995 and 2000.

As the New Jersey State PBA includes over 350 locals across the State, representing municipal, county, state and federal law enforcement officers, we are in a unique position to gauge the effect these grants have had with regard to the needs of the law enforcement community. The Uniform Crime Report maintained by the New Jersey Attorney General over the same period of 1995-2000 showed dramatic drops in every category of crime. It is not a coincidence that this occurred in roughly the same period New Jersey was granted over \$293 million in COPS funding and that 4,563 officers hit the streets.

The current administration has been vocal in its dismissal of these important programs. It has repeatedly proposed steep cuts to the COPS and Byrne-JAG programs, with the COPS hiring initiative receiving the brunt of cuts. Since 2000, funding for the Byrne grants has been cut by more than 83 percent, from \$1.023 billion to \$170 million in fiscal 2008, and the COPS program has been cut by more than 43 percent, from \$1.027 billion to \$607 million. This fiscal 2008 level includes \$20 million for the COPS hiring initiative, which had been zeroed out in the

previous three fiscal years. \$20 million will allow for the funding of approximately 500 officers nationwide. While better than no funding, this is not enough to make a real impact.

Through my work as a NAPO Board member, I know that the loss of needed federal support through the Byrne-JAG program not only adversely affects law enforcement in New Jersey, but also officers and agencies around the country. These cuts will result in the closing of many drug and gang task forces in California, Nevada, and Texas and throughout the Mid-West, at a time when these forces are making tremendous strides in the fight against methamphetamine. States and municipalities will have to lay off law enforcement officers, as they are currently in New Jersey, because of tightened budgets due to the lack of Byrne-JAG money. Additionally, cold case units, identity theft investigations, school violence prevention programs, victims and witness protection services are all now feeling the strain of this cut.

NAPO and the New Jersey State PBA are truly concerned about the steep decline in funding for vital state and local law enforcement assistance programs that has occurred since fiscal year 2002, particularly in light of the additional duties taken on by law enforcement officers since 9/11.

Today, local police departments, already understaffed due to the lack of resources to hire new officers, must place officers into Drug, Gang and Terrorism Task Forces, as well as protect critical infrastructure during periods of heightened national threat advisory levels, often at the expense of street patrols. Additionally, many cities and municipalities, because of tight budget constraints, are forcing officers to take on counterterrorism duties on top of their community policing duties, adding to their responsibilities while patrolling the streets.

For example, the Los Angeles Police Protective League (LAPPL), another NAPO member organization, has reported that when the Los Angeles Police Department is mandated to redeploy officers to protect infrastructure, staff terrorism task forces, and take on counterterrorism duties, patrol units suffer. The LAPPL attributes the rise in gang-related homicides that the city has seen to the lack of resources the police department has to cover the holes in community policing and gang deterrence caused by new terrorism prevention duties.

According to the FBI's semi-annual Uniformed Crime Report (UCR), which was released in December of last year, there was a steep increase in violent crime in the first half of 2006. These results follow the 2005 UCR, which stated that the murder rate was up by 4.5 percent from 2004 to 2005 and that violent crime in general, which included robbery, aggravated assault and homicides, increased by 2.5 percent. Up to this point, 2005 marked the highest rise in the crime rate in 15 years.

State and local law enforcement agencies are struggling to meet the needs of their communities due to increased duties and diminished federal assistance and support. With the police departments in this nation's cities and municipalities understaffed and overworked and national crime rates at their highest levels in fifteen years, how can Congress and this administration justify cutting or eliminating grants under the COPS program and the Byrne-JAG program?

Over the past 15 years, local law enforcement officers and the agencies they serve have made tremendous strides in reducing the level of crime and violence in our communities. This success was in large part because of the much needed assistance and support provided to them by the federal government. The severe cut in funding suffered by the COPS and the Byrne-JAG programs is already beginning to dismantle the progress law enforcement has made in the fight against crime. The correlation between the substantial decreases in federal funding for these justice assistance programs and the sharp rise in crime over the past several years can no longer be ignored. It is the tools provided to state and local law enforcement by these programs that have improved information sharing, cooperation between departments and agencies, equipment, and training, which, in turn, has led to more effective law enforcement and safer communities.

Thank you for this opportunity to speak to you on behalf of America's rank and file law enforcement officers. I ask that my printed testimony be made part of the record, and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.

¹ Stimson, Cully. "Heritage Foundation: Don't Burn the Byrne Grants." FOXNews.com, February 8, 2008. <http://www.foxnews.com/story/0,2933,330008,00.html>