

U. S. SENATE – COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

**Statement of
Thomas J. Nee, President
National Association of Police Organizations
317 South Patrick Street, Alexandria, Virginia 22314**

***"Helping State and Local Law Enforcement During an Economic Downturn"*
January 8, 2009**

Chairman Leahy, Ranking Member Spector, and members of the Committee, my name is Tom Nee and I am a Patrolman with the Boston Police Department. I also serve as the president of the Boston Police Patrolmen's Association, as well as the National Association of Police Organizations (NAPO). I am submitting this statement today on behalf of NAPO, representing over 241,000 active and retired law enforcement officers throughout the United States. NAPO is a coalition of police unions and associations from across the nation, which was organized for the purpose of advancing the interests of America's law enforcement officers through legislative advocacy, political action and education.

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. I would like to take this opportunity to make you aware of the fact that state and local law enforcement in America is being dangerously shortchanged. In a time when city and state budget coffers alike are tighter than ever, our officers are being passed over for the funding they need to fight crime and terrorism. Crime is on the rise and we need the resources to fight back now.

NAPO served as the leading law enforcement organization, working tirelessly with members of Congress and the administration, to enact the COPS program. Since its inception, the COPS Office has been extremely successful in implementing and carrying out its designated objectives. To date, the COPS Office has funded over 118,000 community police officers in 11,300 communities and countless resources, including enhanced crime fighting technology, equipment, and the development of innovative partnerships with communities to fight crime. COPS, together with the Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant (Byrne-JAG) Program, have given state and local law enforcement the necessary funding to truly assist their efforts to keep our nation's communities safe.

With the support of these federal grant programs, community policing has been a dominant force behind the dramatic reduction in crime this nation has witnessed over the past 13 years. In 2000, violent crime rates were at their lowest level in thirty years, particularly in large cities. More police officers patrolling the streets not only provides greater police presence in our communities but also increases police knowledge of crime problems as well. Thus, allowing law enforcement to do its job more efficiently and effectively.

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 and Byrne-JAG was at its highest. It is also no coincidence that the steep reduction in federal support for these programs corresponds with the increases in violent crime rates nationwide. 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

The administration of George W. Bush 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 less than 500 officers nationwide. While better than no funding, this is not enough to make a real impact in our nation's communities.

Today, local police departments, already undermanned due to a 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 and community policing efforts.

Phoenix, Arizona law enforcement agencies have had to redeploy officers and resources to fixed structure protection, such as water treatment facilities, Arizona Public Service power stations, and airports, among other infrastructure. While these resources are being shifted away from community policing, Phoenix is seeing record increases in violent crime. Just between 2005 and 2006, the city saw a nearly 5 percent increase in its violent crime rates, including a 4.5 percent rise in homicides and an over 6 percent rise in aggravated assault. Now if you include 2004 in those numbers, Phoenix law enforcement saw an astounding 12 percent increase in homicides and an almost 20 percent increase in aggravated assault over a two year period.

Law enforcement in Los Angeles, California has seen a substantial amount of resources - officers and funding - shifted to homeland security details. Hundreds of law enforcement personnel have been assigned to terrorism prevention issues. However, the Los Angeles Police Department has limited funds to hire new officers. When the department is mandated to redeploy officers to protect infrastructure, staff terrorism task forces, and take on counterterrorism duties, patrol units suffer. Over the past several years, although Los Angeles has seen a decrease in the overall level of violent crimes, including murder, it has seen a significant increase in gang-related homicides and violent crimes. Los Angeles police attribute this 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.

Chicago and Miami are also seeing similar spikes in gang-related violent crimes and the cities' police departments are spread too thin to properly respond to this disturbing trend. Gang violence, terrorism prevention, and the fight against domestic crime cannot always be taken as separate issues, but as pieces of a whole – the protection of our nation's communities. The issue at hand is about giving state and local law enforcement the equipment, training and personnel it needs to accomplish all of its duties.

Another case in point: New York City. The New York City Police Department (NYPD) has lost over 4,000 officers since 1999. After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the city has been on high alert and its police department has dedicated over 1,000 police officers to counterterrorism activities. Officers

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>

assigned to street patrol are being trained in terrorism prevention in addition to their usual training, adding to their responsibilities while patrolling New York City streets. Despite these additional duties and training, New York City police officers are some of the lowest paid law enforcement officers in the nation.² Low salaries and no premium pay for the added terrorism responsibilities are the primary sources for low officer retention rates and the City's inability to recruit and retain new officers. The NYPD no longer has the funds or personnel to have officers completely dedicated to either terrorism prevention or community policing.

I would like to offer one final example, and it is one that many police departments across the country are also experiencing. On January 1, 2009, the Boston police department was told it might be forced to lay off as many as 200 officers because of cuts in state funding, wiping out hiring efforts to strengthen the force and increase community policing after homicides hit a 10-year high in 2005. If this were to happen, it would end many innovative community policing initiatives that the additional personnel allowed and drive officers off the street and back into patrol cars. There is a high probability that this will result in an increase of violent crime, which not only makes law enforcements' job harder, but also lowers the standard of living for the citizens of Boston.

As we have witnessed in cities such as Phoenix, Los Angeles, New York and Boston, local law enforcement agencies are struggling to meet the needs of their communities due to increased duties, tighter state and local budgets, and diminished federal assistance and support. With the police departments in this nation's largest cities undermanned and overworked and national crime rates at their highest levels in fifteen years, there is no acceptable justification for dangerously low funding levels that the COPS program and the Byrne-JAG program are experiencing.

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 generous assistance and support given to them by the federal government. However, today, as state and local law enforcement take on more duties to protect our communities from rising crime and terrorist threats, federal support of vital assistance programs is in a continuing state of decline. Now is not the time to disregard the programs and resources that have proved to be effective in protecting our neighborhoods. Community oriented policing works. We recognize this fact and so do Americans. It is now time that the federal government recognizes the important impact having more police on the streets has on crime.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this important issue. NAPO looks forward to working with the Committee to ensure that in this time of economic downturn, state and local law enforcement are given the resources they need to protect our nation's communities from crime and terrorism.

² During training, new hires earn \$25,100 a year. Upon completion of the Police Academy, their annual base salary increases to \$32,700. Adjusted for inflation, this is the lowest pay in the history of the NYPD for rookie officers.

Thomas J. Nee
President
National Association of Police Organizations
317 South Patrick Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314
(703) 549-0775
(703) 684-0515 *fax*
www.napo.org