

Community wins when Feds aid local law enforcement

*Testimony of Milwaukee Police Chief Edward A. Flynn to Senate Judiciary Committee
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Some would say in a time of economic stress that investment in police officers doesn't qualify as economic stimulus. That is shortsighted.

We have seen firsthand that crime can cause poverty. Crime and fear of crime drive business opportunities out of distressed neighborhoods, taking with them economic opportunity. Crime and fear of crime prevent economic development and deter business investment. Where cities have controlled crime and reduced fear, they have seen improvements in the economic circumstances of their citizens. Crime control has improved police-community relations and has improved the quality of life in cities.

Change is in the air. A new administration is questioning the assumptions of the past and responding to the American people's heartfelt need for a new direction. A key element of successful change is learning the right lessons from the past and applying them to the present.

Federal assistance to local law enforcement has provided police officers to cities that most needed them – not just to respond to crime but to prevent it. Just as important, those monies have provided officer training and technology assistance that introduced a generation of police leaders to problem-solving skills, enhanced police technology and the tools to successfully reduce community tensions.

Post-9/11, sadly, many of these valuable lessons were lost as funding was drawn away from the crime prevention capabilities of the police and was invested in emergency response equipment. Not surprisingly, crime gains have eroded in many cities and in some have been reversed. Assistance from the federal government, now more than ever, can give local law enforcement the tools it needs to forge ahead.

Milwaukee is an example of a major city that has seen the benefits of that assistance. Since 1994, more than \$113 million in COPS grants has been awarded to local law enforcement in Wisconsin. These grants helped fund 1,353 additional police officers statewide. The Milwaukee Police Department has received \$16.4 million from COPS since 1994 and was able to use COPS Hiring Grant dollars to fund 75 police officer positions. Additionally, those funds enabled MPD to hire six officers to be deployed in and around schools in an effort to promote public safety and to deter criminal and disruptive behavior.

In Milwaukee, we saw a nearly 10 percent drop in violent crime in 2008 over 2007. Homicides of African-American males between the ages of 15 and 29 dropped 66 percent. Homicide in general decreased 45 percent. We have seen the successes of

putting officers on foot beats and the value of having more police officers in more visible roles in our schools. As a community-based, problem-oriented, data-driven agency, the Milwaukee Police Department can build on its successes with additional funds for police hiring, law enforcement technology and community prosecutors.

At a time when we have been announcing crime gains, we also see the city's budget slashed during an economic decline. The effects of the decline in budget dollars amid a distressed economy are most deeply felt in the city's poorest neighborhoods.

Federal assistance to local law enforcement, by reinforcing the ability of police to prevent as well as to respond to crime in a smart, strategic manner that engages communities and builds trust will save lives, calm fears and create neighborhoods capable of sustaining civic life. Milwaukee is doing the most it can with its resources and has seen significant results. Even now as revenues continue to decline, the pressure is on to reduce spending in police departments nationwide and this has consequences for continued crime prevention.

We are engaged in crime prevention, not just first response. We are not solely taking criminals, along with their guns and their drugs off the streets. Our goal is to prevent the next crime.

Crime prevention is the single most cost-effective economic stimulus in our cities. Funding, for hiring, technology and training represents hope for urban neighborhoods plagued by crime, fear and unemployment. It will improve lives, as well as save them.

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