

Statement of

The Honorable Russ Feingold

United States Senator

Wisconsin

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"New Strategies for Combating Violent Crime:

Drawing Lessons from Recent Experience"

Senate Committee on the Judiciary

Wednesday, September 10, 2008

Statement of U.S. Senator Russell D. Feingold

Mr. Chairman, thank you for chairing this important hearing.

I am very pleased that the committee is taking a look at creative ways to combat violent crime in this country, especially in light of the increase in violent crime in this country in 2005 and 2006. According to the 2006 FBI Uniform Crime Report, violent crime in my home state of Wisconsin increased by 18.1 percent between 2005 and 2006 - a statistic that has translated into very real concerns for me and many of my constituents. In a trend that I hope continues, the FBI Uniform Crime Report indicates violent crime nationwide dropped 1.4 percent between 2006 and 2007. While this drop is encouraging, it is an average, and does not mean that violent crime decreased everywhere across the country. Unfortunately, violent crime in Milwaukee and Green Bay, two of the biggest cities in my state, continued to rise between 2006 and 2007. So it is vital that Congress continue to focus its attention on this issue.

We learned in the 1990s that providing more federal resources to state and local law enforcement agencies, in the form of federal grant programs and research initiatives, helps to reduce violent crime. Yet in the past eight years, the Justice Department has ignored these lessons, and has retreated from the successful federal commitments made in the 1990s.

To address violent crime, Congress must provide adequate funding to a number of federal grant programs, including the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant Program, which provides critical funding to help fight violent and drug-related crime, and the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Program,

which is instrumental in providing funding on a range of crime- fighting techniques. I have heard again and again how important these programs have been to Wisconsin law enforcement efforts.

Both of these programs have suffered funding cuts in recent years, and the Byrne program was hit especially hard in fiscal year 2008, which I strongly opposed. Unfortunately, this trend continued in the President's budget proposal for fiscal year 2009. He proposed eliminating funding for both the Byrne JAG and COPS programs, replacing them with new, and woefully underfunded proposals. Congress must reject the President's proposals, as it has before, and must provide funding at levels adequate to allow our state and local partners to keep our communities safe. In particular, Congress must not repeat the mistake of 2008 in its funding of the Byrne JAG program that is so critical in the fight against violent and drug-related crime.

But funding for these federal grant programs is not the only solution. When state and local law enforcement receive federal support for policing, they have difficult decisions to make on how to spend those federal dollars. That is why Senator Specter and I have introduced the PRECAUTION Act. Though small in scope, it is an important step in augmenting the essential financial support the federal government provides to our state and local law enforcement partners through programs such as the Byrne Justice Assistance grants or the COPS grants.

The PRECAUTION Act will create a national commission to review the range of crime prevention and intervention programming available, to identify the most successful strategies, and to report on those findings to the criminal justice community so that successful programs can be replicated in other parts of the country. It will also fund a targeted grant program through the National Institute of Justice to support new, promising and innovative techniques that need federal dollars to be developed into more reliable strategies. In general, it will provide a resource for the criminal justice community to turn to when making decisions about how to further integrate prevention and intervention strategies into traditional law enforcement practices. I named the legislation the PRECAUTION Act because it is far better to invest in precautionary measures now than it is to pay later the costs of crime—a cost borne not only in dollars but in lives.

I very much appreciate the support for this legislation of the National Sheriffs' Association, the Wisconsin Chief of Police Association, Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, the Council for Excellence in Government, the American Society of Criminology, and the Consortium of Social Science Associations.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman, for convening this important hearing.