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Testimony
Mayor Dennis R. Walaker
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Thank you, Senator Conrad, for holding this hearing in Fargo on a very important subject: Public Safety and Security.

I want to welcome the committee members to Fargo and thank you for the chance to discuss federal funding for public safety agencies in our community.

A common theme you will hear from all of the speakers representing Fargo and Cass County today will be the need to have federal funding allocated directly to the local agencies responsible for public safety. Direct allocation has worked well in the past, is currently working well with other federal programs like Community Development Block Grants, and is the most efficient, responsible and cost-effective way of ensuring our residents receive the service they need.

In the past, COPS grants to the City of Fargo allowed us to put more officers on the streets. Later in this hearing, Police Chief Keith Ternes will describe how the loss of these grants has impacted his department.

You will also hear from Fire Chief Bruce Hoover, who will discuss a federal requirement that his department must respond to emergencies throughout southeastern North Dakota. This requirement did not come with the funding needed for his staff to stay current in training for hazardous material spills and other dangerous situations.

Another common theme today will be the need for a comprehensive and coordinated communication system. In Fargo and Cass County, the efforts of the public safety leaders have resulted in the development of a joint dispatch center for both Fargo/West Fargo/Cass County, North Dakota and Moorhead/Dilworth/Clay County, Minnesota. The dedication of Fargo's Homeland Security funds from 2003, combined with a special COPS communication grant, created a state of the art system that allows patrol officers and firefighters in Fargo to communicate directly with officers in other cities or rural sites without going through the dispatch center. Future plans call for software that will allow dispatch center personnel to track squad cars, fire trucks and ambulances at all times. Without the prioritization of federal funds for communication development, these systems would not be possible.

Finally, I want to emphasize that all public safety efforts are a work in progress. The federal government needs to be a partner in this effort by funding its well-intended mandates so they do not become a local burden that taxpayers must bear.

Once again, thank you for coming to Fargo and I look forward to working with you in the future.