

UNITED STATES SENATE
Budget Committee Hearing
Testimony regarding Federal support to local law enforcement

March 26th, 2008

Prepared by:
Arland H. Rasmussen
Chief of Police
West Fargo, ND

Thank you for allowing me to provide testimony in favor of maintaining federal dollars supporting local efforts in the fight against and prevention of crime within our communities.

As the Chief of Police for the City of West Fargo I not only represent the fastest growing city in North Dakota but today I also represent both small and large agencies as President of the North Dakota Chief's of Police Association. Sometimes representing both small and large departments can be a conflict but today our message is united and that message is we need your help to simply maintain our current level of effectiveness! Our efforts and our voices are in unison when we ask that you please do not cut federal funding to programs such as: Byrne/JAG grants, The Regional Information Sharing System (RISS), COPS Grants and Law Enforcement Community Block Grants.

The above programs have been and still are providing fundamental and essential help to law enforcement in our everyday effort to provide services to the citizens of our communities. Examples and the need for each are as follows but today I will emphasize two areas and speak more on behalf of smaller police departments that I represent as President of the North Dakota Chief's of Police Association.

Byrne/JAG: This program has allowed communities to cooperate in the fight against drugs by forming Joint Task Forces. These Task Forces have done and continue to do excellent work in the fight against drugs. I believe they have been instrumental in the reduction of drug related crimes as evidenced by the decrease we have seen regarding the use of methamphetamine. However, the battle still rages and now is not the time to hamper the effort by reducing funding and allowing this terrible drug to gain the upper hand once again.

I have spoken to smaller agencies from both the Eastern and Western sides of ND and all agreed that they will be forced to cut manpower to these task forces if funding is cut. Chief Wentz of Williston advises that their task force includes Williams Co., McKenzie Co., Divide Co. and the Cities of Williston, Watford City, and Crosby ND. (A very large geographical area). Chief Wentz told me each time the grants have been cut he was unsure if the task force would or could survive but at that time his area was known as the meth producing capital of ND so there was an extreme need and fear so the communities came up with the additional funding! Meth usage is still significant but the labs are down

and he attributes some of that success to the Task Force but is even more concerned that cuts in the Byrne Grant will mean cuts in the task force.

The same is true when I spoke with Chief's from the cities of Wahpeton and Valley City. Both indicated the Task Forces were essential in their communities. Both indicated that simply the time and resources needed to work drugs precluded their communities from working alone. They also stated that if they could not do this alone certainly their more rural outlying agencies could not fight the battle. All agreed that their cities have gone the distance and further cuts will simply jeopardize the safety of the community.

RISS: The Regional Information Sharing System consists of six regional centers that provide all levels of law enforcement nationwide with valuable, effective and integrated services and resources to assist their information-sharing and investigative efforts. The RISS Internet-based criminal information network provides an established communications backbone and infrastructure for agencies to securely share information and access vital resources. RISS is instrumental for us to combat multijurisdictional criminal groups and activities. The uniqueness of RISS is that it connects agencies as small as two and three person police and sheriff's offices to agencies with hundreds of employees, that can be municipal, county, state and federal. In fact there are over 6,000 federal, state, county and municipal agencies nationwide that belong to RISS serving an estimated 65,000+ officers!

In North Dakota we have 132 agencies that belong to the RISS Program. RISS provides them access to equipment that their agency can not afford, it provides services that the vast majority of ND agencies can not obtain other places including analytical services, computer forensics and a host of others. Throughout the years member agencies, including the ND Bureau of Criminal Investigation, have used and continue to rely on RISS for all these various services. Historically there has been by-partisan support for this program because it works and it gets the job done. Cutting funding to this program would be devastating.

COPS: The COPS program provides immediate financial assistance to communities so that they may add critically needed personnel and resources to their law enforcement agencies. The funding bridges current financial gaps and allows the agencies to gradually make adjustments to their budgets covering the additional expenses. This program has been utilized by many, not only in ND but throughout the nation, to place officers in schools, on state and federal task forces as well as on the street serving their community.

Law Enforcement Block Grants: Allowing communities to identify and meet critical needs and apply for federal funding has been essential to so many. This grant has been used to obtain equipment that many of our communities could never have obtained otherwise but was identified as necessary and is critical to keeping us safe.

Our communities continue to change and the services we provide for our communities continue to grow and change. Mobility has brought a diverse group of people to our communities that need and expect our assistance. These are the same people that work hard to make our country great and they deserve to be safe and secure as they work and raise their families. Please help law enforcement continue to protect and serve the citizens of our communities that make our nation great.