

Crime—COPS Program

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STATEMENT BY ATTORNEY GENERAL JANET RENO ON TODAY'S INSPECTOR GENERAL'S REPORT ON THE COPS PROGRAM

"We have every intention of reaching the President's goal of adding 100,000 police officers to our nation's communities.

"The Inspector General's report is a constructive tool for improving program management in reaching that goal. I am pleased to see that the COPS Office has already addressed a number of the concerns raised in the report. For example, COPS has created a grant monitoring division and has implemented better procedures for enforcing the timely submission of progress reports.

"While COPS agrees with many of the Inspector General's recommendations about program management, COPS disagrees with the report's conclusions about the overall success of the program. That is a why I have convened an Audit Resolution Committee to address these issues.

"The COPS program works. I have seen its success firsthand in the cities and towns across America where COPS funding and community policing are making the streets safer and the community stronger. We recently learned that crime has declined for an unprecedented seventh consecutive year and the community police funded under the COPS program have contributed to that success."

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99-327

CRIME —
COPS program



U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Community Oriented Policing Services

Communications Division

1100 Vermont Ave., NW
Washington, DC 20530

For Immediate Release
Monday, July 26, 1999

Contact: Dan Pfeiffer
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**STATEMENT BY MARY LOU LEARY,
ACTING DIRECTOR OF THE COPS OFFICE**

Mary Lou Leary, Acting Director of the COPS Office, released the following statement today:

"The Inspector General plays an important role in helping improve program management. The COPS Office has already begun implementing a number of the Inspector General's recommendations regarding the way the program has been managed. However, COPS disagrees with the report's conclusions about the overall success of the program."

"COPS has already taken a number of corrective action steps that address areas of concern in the Inspector General's report. The COPS Office has:

- created a specific monitoring division to ensure that COPS grantees comply with grant conditions;
- instituted a new award acceptance policy that has already cut the number of unaccepted officer positions by more than 62 percent;
- provided MORE grantees with additional guidance related to redeployment tracking; and
- developed a comprehensive manual, which clarifies COPS grant conditions."

"The Inspector General uses a group of 149 audits of individual COPS grantees as a basis for drawing broader conclusions about the COPS program as a whole. In fact, the COPS Office directed the Inspector General to 103 of the audited agencies, because it was aware of potential problems within those agencies. The Inspector General has also acknowledged that the remaining 46 sites were not selected randomly and that possible non-compliance was one of the criteria used for selecting these sites. To date, COPS has awarded grants to more than 11,000 agencies nationwide. The 149 audits, some of which were conducted two years ago, represent less than 1.2 percent of the total universe of COPS grantees. The results of these audits were also included in the *Summary of Audit Findings* released in April of this year and have been available on the Inspector General's web site since October of 1998."

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"COPS Office has significant disagreements with the Inspector General's findings in the areas of retention, supplanting, community policing, and MORE redeployment. The Department of Justice convened the Audit Resolution Committee to resolve the dispute between the COPS Office and the Inspector General regarding the individual audit findings, which the Inspector General uses to support many of the conclusions in this Audit. This process is still ongoing and no final decisions have been made. Until the audit resolution process concludes, any conclusions drawn from this report are premature and questionable".

"As a part of this process, the Inspector General randomly selected 40 audits for review by the COPS Office. COPS found that it disagreed with the Inspector General in:

- 50 percent of the redeployment findings;
- 70 percent of the community policing findings;
- 90 percent of the retention findings; and
- 100 percent of the supplanting findings."

"This report does not portray an accurate picture of the tremendous impact the COPS program is having in communities across the nation. The COPS program works - crime is down, more agencies than ever before are doing community policing, and we are well on our way to meeting the President's goal of adding 100,000 officers to the beat."

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For Immediate Release

Contact: Suzanne Drouet (202) 514-3435
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INSPECTOR GENERAL ASSESSES MANAGEMENT OF COPS PROGRAM

July 26, 1999 (Washington, D.C.) – Michael R. Bromwich, Inspector General of the U.S. Department of Justice, today released an audit assessing the Department's management of the \$8.8 billion grant program intended to add 100,000 additional police officers to the nation's streets. The audit examined whether the President's goal to add 100,000 officers by the year 2000 would be met and assessed the quality of monitoring and guidance provided to grantee recipients.

"The Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) has not been consistent with respect to when the 100,000 additional officers funded by the Crime Act will be 'on the street,'" Bromwich said. "COPS officials informed us that their goal is to fund – that is, to have approved grant applications for – 100,000 new officers by the end of FY 2000. This is significantly different from having 100,000 new officers hired and actually deployed to the streets by the end of FY 2000, a goal that has been stated publicly by COPS and various Administration officials and has appeared in Department of Justice publications during the past four years."

The Office of the Inspector General (OIG) audit found that COPS grants will not result in 100,000 additional police officers on the streets by FY 2000. In fact, based on projections by the COPS Office, only 59,765 of the additional 100,000 officers will be deployed by the end of FY 2000.

"The COPS Office counts an officer as funded when it approves the grantees' application. We found that COPS was counting grants and police officers even where the grant had never been accepted or had been terminated," Bromwich said. "While COPS projects that it will fund 107,019 additional officers by the end of FY 2000, our audit raises serious questions about whether several thousand of these 'funded' officers that are currently counted toward COPS' goal will ever materialize."

In 1994, the President pledged to put 100,000 additional police officers on America's streets to promote community participation in the fight against crime. He subsequently signed the Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994, authorizing the Attorney General to implement over six years an \$8.8 billion grant program for state and local law enforcement agencies to hire or redeploy 100,000 additional officers to perform community policing.

The Attorney General established the COPS Office to administer the grant program and to advance community policing across the country. The COPS Office manages the programmatic aspects of the grant program while the Department's Office of Justice Programs (OJP) handles the financial aspects. In order to meet the President's goal of putting 100,000 additional police officers on the street, COPS developed six primary hiring and redeployment grant programs for state and local law enforcement agencies. Hiring grants fund the hiring of additional police officers and generally last for three years. Redeployment grants are generally one-year grants and fund the costs of equipment, technology, and support resources (including civilian personnel) to redeploy existing officers from administrative duties to the streets. At the end of the grant periods, the state or local entity is expected to continue funding the new positions, or continue the redeployment of officers into community policing that resulted from grant-funded equipment and technology purchases.

The OIG audit found that as of February 1999 COPS and OJP had awarded approximately \$5.0 billion in grants under the six programs to fund the hiring or redeployment of more than 92,300 officers, of which 50,139 officers had been hired and deployed to the streets. The COPS Office explained that a considerable delay exists between the time grants are awarded and when new officers are hired and deployed.

"This audit report is not a verdict on the concept of community policing generally nor a judgment on any contribution made by the COPS program specifically to the reduction of crime rates and other results that have been claimed for it," Bromwich said. "Rather, this report assesses the management and administration of the COPS program - and the stewardship of billions of taxpayer dollars - by the Department of Justice."

The OIG audit concluded that management improvements are needed in the COPS grant program to ensure that 100,000 additional officers are funded and eventually deployed. We reached our conclusion because:

- law enforcement agencies had not accepted approximately \$485 million in grant funds offered by COPS within the designated acceptance period. Nonetheless, COPS counts the 7,722 officers that could be funded by these grants towards its goal. At the time of our audit, these grants had not been accepted even though an average of more than one year had passed since they were awarded. In addition, COPS also prematurely counted another 2,526 officers towards its goal of 100,000 new officers, even though the 741 award documents for these officers had not been provided to the grantee for acceptance. These grants accounted for another \$96 million.

In its response to the OIG audit, COPS reported that it has contacted state and local agencies awarded 871 grants through FY 1997 but who failed to return signed acceptance letters. As a result of these contacts, COPS has withdrawn the grants for 461 (53 percent) of these grantees and either has or is in the process of deobligating the grant funds. The COPS Office also said that on July 10, 1999, it mailed letters to another 562 agencies awarded grants in FYs 1998-99 who had failed to formally accept the COPS funds.

- grantees had terminated at least 500 grants for 1,300 officer positions during the first four years of the COPS program, and additional grants may be terminated during the remainder of the program. COPS had not deobligated 127 of the 500 grants totaling about \$15.1 million. Moreover, the 373 grants that were deobligated were not deobligated promptly. Failure to promptly deobligate terminated grants could give the appearance that COPS is further towards meeting the 100,000 goal than is the case.
- The OIG encountered a high degree of difficulty in establishing that funds under the Making Officer Redeployment Effective (MORE) program actually resulted in additional COPS officers on the streets. Specifically, 78 percent of the 67 individual grantees we audited with MORE grants could not demonstrate they had or would redeploy officers from administrative duties to the streets. One-third of COPS' projected goal of 100,000 additional officers depends on actual redeployment occurring under the MORE program.
- grantees will not be required to retain through FY 2000 at least 31,091 of the total funded officer positions because: (1) COPS and OJP did not require the grantees to retain the officer positions under the earliest two grant programs, and 2) for the remaining programs, COPS only requires the grantees to retain the positions for a minimum of one budget cycle after the budget cycle in which the grants expire.

The OIG audit also found that many COPS grantees failed to submit required monitoring or financial reports to COPS and OJP. These reports are critical for COPS and OJP to monitor compliance with key grant conditions such as supplanting and retention of officers. In addition to improving grantee-reporting rates, the OIG recommended that COPS provide clearer guidance to grant recipients on the terms and conditions of the COPS grants.

In response to the issues raised during the audit, the COPS Office has taken steps to address identified weaknesses in grant program management and administration. COPS has not accepted our recommendation to discontinue counting officers as funded before the grantees accept the grants and has formally contested many of our audits of individual grantees. However, the COPS Office is taking action to follow up on unaccepted grants and to ensure more timely deobligation of grant funds when agencies do not accept grant awards.

The report will be posted on the Inspector General's website at "<http://www.usdoj.gov/oig>" under the section entitled "Special Reports."

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**Q&A:
Programmatic Audit of the COPS Office**

- Q:** The latest Inspector General's report raises questions about the COPS Office's ability to meet the President's goal of adding 100,000 officers to the street. Will the COPS Office achieve this goal?
- A:** The Inspector General acknowledges that COPS has already begun addressing some of the concerns raised in the report. Because of the commitment of the COPS Office to use this report as part of its continuing efforts to improve program management, I have every confidence the COPS Office will meet its goal of adding 100,000 officers to the street. In fact on May 12th, the COPS Office funded the 100,000th officer. COPS will continue working to get all 100,000 officers on the street where they are needed most.
- Q:** The Senate Appropriations Committee recently voted to "zero out" the COPS program. Doesn't this report validate the Senate Committee's actions?
- A:** The tremendous benefits of the COPS program are clear and eliminating the program would be a tremendous mistake. Crime is down for the seventh year in a row and law enforcement and community leaders from around the country tell me that community policing is improving the quality of policing across America. The success of the COPS program speaks for itself. The Inspector General's report, on the other hand, is a constructive tool for improving internal program management. We must continue to do everything in our power to make American families safer in their neighborhoods. I hope that the Congress listens to the police chiefs, sheriffs, and community leaders and continues this important program.
- Q:** How does this report differ from the IG report released in April?
- A:** In April, the Inspector General released a summary of 149 audits of local agencies. COPS directed the Inspector General to 103 of these agencies, because it was already aware of potential problems. This number represents 1.2 percent of the COPS Office's 11,300 grantees. This report focuses on the management and administration of the COPS Office and bases some of its conclusions on the 149 audits from the previous report to draw a number of conclusions about the COPS Office as a whole.

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Q: Is it true that the COPS Office disputes this report?

A: The COPS Office disagrees a significant number of the findings in the 149 individual grantee audits. There is an audit resolution process in place within the Department of Justice to resolve this dispute and that process is still ongoing.

Q: The Inspector General says that COPS has not been clear with regard to its goal. Is this true?

A: COPS recognizes that statements regarding its goal have not been entirely consistent in distinguishing between the first step of funding the addition of 100,000 officers by the end of FY2000 and the ultimate goal of seeing those 100,000 officers deployed to the streets. Nonetheless, the overwhelming evidence indicates that the COPS Office has acknowledged that the goal of the COPS program is to advance community policing and add 100,000 officers to the street through a funding process that will last until September 13, 2000.

Q: What is the goal of the COPS Office?

A: The COPS Office was created in 1994 to advance community policing and add community policing officers to the beat. The statute that created the COPS Office clearly authorizes it to continue awarding grants through fiscal year 2000.

Q: The report says that only 50,000 officers are on the street. Does that mean the program is not working?

A: The fact that more than 50,000 additional officers are already on the street fighting crime and making a difference in our communities is a clear sign the program is working. The 1994 Crime Act created the COPS program to add 100,000 community policing officers to the street. The first step in meeting this goal is a six-year funding process that is authorized to continue through September 13, 2000. It can take an agency an average of 18 months to recruit, hire, and train the best available candidate. The public would not be well served if we directed grantees to compromise their recruiting, hiring, or training procedures for new officers simply to demonstrate that the COPS program could result in officers on the street overnight.

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- Q:** What about the supplanting charges raised in the report – that COPS money is going to fund existing officers?
- A:** COPS grants are for officers above and beyond what local jurisdictions would have in the absence of the COPS program. COPS has always vigorously enforced the non-supplanting requirement.
- Q:** The IG criticized the community policing programs of some of the grantees; is it true that some of them are not practicing community policing?
- A:** The specifics of successful community policing strategies differ from neighborhood to neighborhood. However, at its essence, community policing is a partnership with the community to proactively address problems of crime and violence. This partnership is a funding requirement and the COPS Office monitors its grantees to ensure that they are working with the community. Non-compliant agencies are often required to attend community policing training to continue receiving funding. Agencies that fail to implement community policing consistent with their community policing plan may be forced to repay grant funds or deemed ineligible for other Justice Department funding.
- Q:** Does the COPS Office count officers, before the agency accepts the award?
- A:** Once the COPS Office approves an application for additional officers and makes a formal announcement of the grant award, it begins counting the officers. If an agency decides not to accept their award, COPS will make the appropriate adjustment to the officer count and deobligate the funds. The COPS Office agrees with the Inspector General's recommendation that some aspects of the award acceptance process needs improvement. That is why COPS has instituted a new policy to ensure that agencies accept their awards in a timely fashion.
- Q:** What are COPS MORE grants?
- A:** During the creation of the 1994 Crime Act, leaders in the law enforcement community told the Administration and Congress that in addition to funding for new officers, it also needed funding to redeploy officers to the street. COPS MORE grants directly respond to this need. MORE grants fund technology, equipment, and the hiring of civilians so that officers can spend more of their time on the street.

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- Q:** Nearly 40,000 of the 100,000 officers are funded under the MORE program. Why?
- A:** The 1994 Crime Act directs the COPS Office to spend 20 percent of its budget on redeployment grants. With the COPS Office's annual appropriation of approximately \$1.4 billion, this amounts to more than \$300 million in MORE grants every year. The MORE program receives requests in excess of available funds every year. The number of officers funded under MORE is a direct result of our statutorily mandated appropriation.
- Q:** How do you track officers funded under MORE?
- A:** Agencies receiving MORE funds are required to track and calculate their redeployment. The COPS Office collects this information throughout the year.
- Q:** The IG's report states that many jurisdictions are not tracking their redeployment, is this true?
- A:** The OIG raises red flags whenever it encounters agencies that have received a MORE grant, but do not have a tracking system. In a number of cases, the agencies cited by the IG had not yet begun redeployment. COPS does not require agencies to track until redeployment begins. Agencies in violation of this grant condition must institute a tracking system as soon as possible or face possible forfeiture of grant funds. COPS works with agencies that are having difficulty developing a tracking system.
- Q:** Will local agencies be able to retain their COPS funded officers?
- A:** The overwhelming majority of COPS grantees plan to retain their officers. The COPS Office will work closely with every grantee to help them plan for retention. A recent survey found that 96 percent of COPS grantees intend to retain their officers. The 21st Century Policing Initiative includes \$50 million to help economically distressed communities retain their COPS funded officers.

OIG REPORT**COPS RESPONSE****ACTIONS TAKEN****A. IG's questions about the COPS Office's ability to meet the President's goal of adding 100,000 officers to the street**

As of February 1, 1999, law enforcement agencies had not accepted approximately \$485 million in grant funds (representing 7,722 officer positions) offered by COPS within the designated grant period. COPS counts the 7,722 officers towards its goal of 100,000 officers.

COPS agrees that the award acceptance procedures need strengthening. COPS has already undertaken a number of steps to strengthen this aspect of program management.

- COPS has contacted grantees who have delayed in accepting their grant awards to confirm their intent to use the grant funding. As of July 1, 1999, only 777 grants for a total of 2,876 positions do not have signed awards within the original 45 day period.
- Reflecting the reality of the local budget process, COPS has extended the grant acceptance period from 45 days to 90 days.

At the time of the audit, COPS had not deobligated 127 grants totaling \$15.1 million. Moreover, other grants were not deobligated promptly. Failure to promptly deobligate grants could give the appearance that COPS is further towards meeting the 100,000 goal than is the case.

The OIG is factually wrong in implying that the COPS Office continues counting declined or withdrawn grants towards the 100,000 officer count until the grant funds are deobligated. Instead, the COPS Office adjusts the 100,000 count after receiving written notification of the grantee's intent to decline or withdraw from the grant. The deobligation process is unrelated to the 100,000 officer count.

- COPS has strengthened the deobligation process.
- To improve the timeliness of deobligation, the COPS Finance Team gives priority to withdrawal packages.
- The COPS Finance Team is undertaking a reconciliation process to confirm withdrawn grants have been deobligated.

The Inspector General encountered a high degree of difficulty in establishing that funds under the MORE program actually resulted in additional COPS officers on the street.

To track redeployment an agency must first implement their MORE project. The IG did not consistently evaluate whether the grantee had actually implemented the project before issuing a finding of non-compliance.

- COPS has provided every MORE grantee with information on how to track redeployment
- COPS has formed a working group to develop additional training for MORE grantees on an expedited basis.
- COPS is identifying grantees who have not yet developed a tracking plan and referring these grantees for technical assistance.

Grantees will not be required to retain through 2000 at least 31,091 of the total funded officer positions. Of 131 grantees, 70 percent had not developed a good faith plan to retain.

The IG's own survey confirmed that 96 percent of surveyed grantees intend to retain their COPS officers. Similarly, 96 percent of 307 COPS Phase I grantees whose grant periods have ended confirmed on their final grant status reports that they had requested funding to retain their COPS officer positions beyond the life of the grant even though retention was not a requirement of the Phase I program.

- As of June 16, 1998, grantees are required to submit a written retention plan with their application.
- All grantees will be required to submit a final retention plan with their final progress report.

OIG REPORT**COPS RESPONSE****ACTIONS TAKEN**

With respect to approximately 41 percent of the 147 grantees that the Inspector General tested for supplanting, it found indications that COPS grant funds were used to supplant local funds.

COPS has found that the Inspector General's analysis of supplanting in the individual audits is often inaccurate, thus overstating the frequency which supplanting actually occurs.

- COPS has completed its review of 28 agencies cited for supplanting by the Inspector General. COPS has found no evidence of supplanting in 22 of the 28 agencies. COPS recommended five of the six agencies where supplanting did occur to Inspector General, because it was already aware of potential problems.
- COPS investigates all allegations of supplanting and remedies all cases of confirmed supplanting violations.

B. Monitoring COPS Grantees

COPS and OJP need to improve their monitoring of grantees

The COPS Office is committed to monitoring COPS grantees to ensure that they comply with grant requirements

- COPS and OJP have created specific monitoring divisions that are dedicated exclusively to grant monitoring efforts.
- COPS has improved its on-site monitoring procedures and its site visit follow up procedures.

The Inspector General determined that many grantees did not submit the required monitoring reports. COPS needs to increase its monitoring efforts to ensure that reports are submitted

COPS agrees that it needs to strengthen its management controls related to the submission of progress reports.

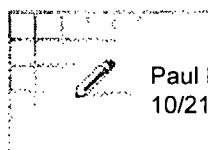
- COPS recently began suspending grant funds to agencies that were delinquent in submitting reports.
- As of July 1999, COPS has reached a 97 percent compliance rate for 1998 Hiring Progress Reports.

C. Improving Guidance Regarding Essential Grant Requirements

The Inspector General's findings suggest that COPS guidance to grantees could be improved to ensure that critical grant requirements are understood and met.

The COPS Office is committed to providing its grantees with clear, easily understood guidance regarding federal grant requirements.

- COPS has recently developed a comprehensive manual, which clarifies COPS grant conditions. This manual is currently available on the Internet or from the USDOJ Response Center.
- COPS also now participates in regional financial management training for grantees.



Paul D. Glastris
10/21/99 12:01:44 PM

Crime -
COPS

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To: See the distribution list at the bottom of this message

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Draft 10/21/99 11:00 a.m.

Glastris

**PRESIDENT WILLIAM J. CLINTON
REMARKS AT NAPO TOP COPS EVENT
ROSE GARDEN, THE WHITE HOUSE
WASHINGTON, DC
October 21, 1999**

Acknowledgments: Dep. AG Eric Holder; Senators Biden and Leahy; Rep Stupak; NAPO Pres. Tom Scotto; NAPO Exec. Dir. Bob Scully [a great friend of this administration and a great fighter for the COPS program]; new COPS Director Tom Frazier [former Baltimore police commissioner];

In 1968, Robert Kennedy said that the fight against crime is "a fight to preserve that quality of community which is at the root of our greatness." The men and women we honor here today are at the forefront of that fight, and exemplify that greatness. They are true American heroes.

They have performed astonishing acts of valor and humanity. Crossing the line of fire to rescue downed fellow officers. Being shot and wounded, yet managing to return fire and subdue the assailant. Flying across the Alaskan wilderness to single-handedly capture five armed kidnappers. Spotting a dangerous gas leak and evacuating 200 citizens moments before their apartment building exploded. These and other amazing stories aren't from TV shows. They actually happened. They represent, in dramatic form, the kind of professional police work that goes on every day across this country. Just last week, three brave officers were ambushed and killed, and two others were wounded, by a gunman in Pleasonton, Texas. We mourn their passing, and offer our prayers for their families. Every day, police officers put on their badges and uniforms, knowing that at any moment, they, too, may be called upon put their own lives on the line to protect the American people.

Because of their efforts, America today is a significantly safer place. This week, the Justice Department reported that the crime rate fell again last year, in all categories and all parts of the country. The murder rate is now at a 31 year low. Crime has been dropping now

for seven straight years, making this longest continuous decline in crime ever recorded. And that's in part because we've turned to effective, common-sense strategies like community policing.

Seven years ago, it looked to many people as if the crime rate were fated to rise forever; that the police were powerless to stop it; and that there was nothing the federal government could or should do about it. I didn't share that view. Since my days as Attorney General of Arkansas 20 years ago, I had worked with police departments. Attended the funerals of too many fallen officers. And seen first hand the dramatic difference that good police work can make.

When I ran for President, I said we could make America safer by helping local communities put 100,000 new police officers on the street, to walk beats, to apprehend criminals, to help neighborhood groups chase away drug dealers, and prevent crime from happening in the first place. After I became President, and with the vital support of NAPO, we passed the Brady bill in 1993 and the crime bill in 1994. We began our COPS program. We toughened penalties and passed assault weapons ban.

Today, five years after we first opened the doors of the COPS program office, we have already funded over 100,000 police officers, ahead of time and under budget. Anyone who doubts that these police officers have made a difference should consider this: 5 of the 32 officers we honor today were funded under our COPS program.

I am grateful, and America is grateful, for the bravery, the dedication, and the plain hard work of our nation's police officers, who have helped bring the crime rate down for seven years now. But I doubt that there is an officer here today, or a citizen in this nation, who thinks the crime rate is low enough.

That is why I have called on Congress to do more of what we know works. Put up to 50,000 more police on the street, especially in our highest-crime neighborhoods. Hire thousands of new community prosecutors to work with police and local residents. Provide police departments with the latest, best crime fighting technology, from better communications systems so police from different jurisdictions can talk to each other, to crime mapping systems that allow police to see criminal patterns and pinpoint hotspots.

I believe there is bipartisan support for this. We see that in the broad backing that Senator Biden has received for his bill that would extend the life of the COPS program for another five years. I hope Congress passes Sen. Biden's bill, and if they do, I'll sign it.

If we do these things, we can move dramatically closer to what I believe should be our long-term goal: to make America the safest big nation on earth.

Unfortunately, the Republican majority in Congress has produced a budget bill that drastically cuts our COPS program. Their bill would mean 3000 fewer new police officers in the coming year, no community prosecutors, and far less crime fighting technology. This

makes no sense. Why, when crime is dropping, would you want to cut your most successful crime-fighting tool? That's like tracking a criminal, cornering him, then letting him go.

Today, Congress is sending me their crime spending bill that fails to fully fund our plan to put more police on the street. When it hits my desk, I will veto it.

Our strategy, which has helped bring the crime rate down for seven years, is very simple: more police, fewer guns. The Republican Congress wants to go in the opposite direction: fewer police, more guns. Their strategy is wrong for America.

I expressed my views on this two days ago, in a meeting with congressional leaders of both parties at the White House. We agreed to work together in a bipartisan spirit to resolve our differences, make the tough choices, and reach an overall agreement on a budget that lives within its means and lives up to the values of the American people. There is no greater value than the safety of our citizens. So I call on Congress to fully fund our COPS program, put more police officers on the street, and pass common-sense gun legislation that keeps guns out of the wrong hands.

I believe that by working together, we can make this a season of progress. We can lengthen the life of Social Security and Medicare, invest in 100,000 new teachers, protect the environment, strengthen national defense, and make America the safest big nation on earth. If we do, then the greatness that Robert F. Kennedy talked about in 1968, we can achieve in the 21st Century.

Thank you and God bless you.

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