

**Testimony for Senate Budget Committee**

*February 20, 2007*

Prepared by Keith A. Ternes  
Chief of Police  
Fargo Police Department  
Fargo, North Dakota

As the City of Fargo continues to grow both economically and geographically, the challenges associated with maintaining a safe and secure environment for the city also continues to grow. Although Fargo is a community free from most forms of violent crime, the city is experiencing an increase in crime similar to that of other cities across the country. Challenged predominately by property crime, the Fargo Police Department remains committed to keeping our city one of the safest in the nation.

The continuous effort put forth by the men and women of the Fargo Police Department has been adversely impacted however, by the ever diminishing financial support received from the federal government. With the drastic reductions in funding for the COPS program, Byrne grants, and other law enforcement programs, many police agencies (including the Fargo Police Department) are no longer able to readily obtain the resources needed to effectively address the increasing crime rate.

Without question, the most pressing need for my department is personnel. Regardless of the crime issue we are attempting to resolve; whether it be the continuous challenges associated with methamphetamine use, crimes against children via the internet, gang related crime, or petty thefts, I need police officers to do the work. The ability to add officers at a rate which (at a minimum) parallels Fargo's growth is absolutely essential for maintaining a safe environment within the community. And although the city's elected officials recognize the need to fund this resource on the local level, there is still a need for the federal government's financial support.

In the mid to late 1990's when the COPS program was adequately funded, the City of Fargo took full advantage of the financial assistance offered through this program and was able to add a number of the much needed police officers to its understaffed police force. In fact during this time, the department was able to add nearly twenty officers to the force, which would have been virtually impossible without the financial aid of the COPS program. Since the federal governments shift in focus and priority, from providing support to local law enforcement agencies to Homeland Security, the Fargo Police Department has found it increasingly difficult to add police officers.

The policymakers in Washington, D.C. have repeatedly told local officials that the concept and strategy of "Homeland Security" starts at the local level. But as the support received from the federal government becomes less and less available, it becomes increasingly difficult for police agencies such as mine to effectively follow this plan.

What has become even more frustrating is that the one thing I as the city's police chief need more than anything else (personnel) is the one resource I cannot seem to get my hands on, while other resources which I do not need are readily available. I don't need any more gas masks, flashlights, generators, or duct tape. What I need is people! What the City of Fargo and its police force needs is the re-establishment of the funding of the COPS program and Byrne grants, which allows the Fargo Police Department and other law enforcement agencies to be successful in keeping our communities safe. In that regard, I respectfully ask that these programs receive their due consideration and an appropriate allocation of funding.