



**National League of Cities**



**Leaders at the Core of Better Communities**

May 1, 2008

The Honorable Robert C. Byrd  
Chair  
Appropriations Committee  
United States Senate  
311 Hart Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran  
Ranking Member  
Appropriations Committee  
United States Senate  
113 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable David Obey  
Chair  
Appropriations Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2314 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Jerry Lewis  
Ranking Member  
Appropriations Committee  
U.S. House of Representatives  
2112 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Byrd, Ranking Member Cochran, Chairman Obey and Ranking Member Lewis:

On behalf of state and local elected and appointed government officials across the United States, we are writing to urge you to take a leadership role in restoring Byrne Justice Assistance Grants (Byrne JAG) funding in an FY '08 emergency supplemental bill, reestablishing the federal-local partnership on public safety. If the two-thirds cut in funding from FY '07 is not reversed, there will be significant and long-term setbacks to the safety of the communities and citizens we all represent.

The FY '08 cuts in funding could not come at a worse time. The Office of Justice Programs and experts around the country agree that we are seeing a significant and prolonged violent crime increase in many local communities—a trend we haven't seen in fifteen years. Byrne JAG has consistently proven to be one of the most effective federal-local collaborations in keeping America safe. This was exemplified last month when drug task forces in 41 states engaged in a

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coordinated operation called *Operation Byrne Blitz*. In just one day, 4,220 individuals were arrested on drug-related charges, 20,851 pounds of marijuana, 2,886 marijuana plants, 1,749 pounds of cocaine, 120 pounds of methamphetamine, 6,973 pharmaceutical pills, 13,244 ecstasy pills and a variety of other drugs were seized. Over 1,005 methamphetamine labs, 666 firearms and \$13,463,832.00 in U.S. currency were also seized and 228 children endangered by their environment were referred to the appropriate child protection agency. This impressive operation would not have been possible without federal participation through Byrne JAG funding.

*Operation Byrne Blitz* highlights the fact that homeland security and crime represent national challenges stretching beyond local borders. Byrne JAG partnership serves as the driving force that spurs the cooperation necessary for a holistic approach to public safety and crime across local, state and regional lines. It is an incredible return on investment for the federal government—Byrne JAG is less than a fraction of one percent of the total spending on local law enforcement resources; states, counties and local cities and towns pay the lion's share.

Additionally, Byrne JAG is the only federal program that systematically and broadly targets criminal activity. The grant covers issues that are interstate in nature such as sex-offender databases, gang crime, identity theft investigations, multijurisdictional drug enforcement efforts, and other regional information-sharing and coordinating efforts. Importantly, it allows local investigators to become regional in their approach to combating both the roots of crime and its enforcement, ensuring criminal activities are not simply pushed into neighboring jurisdictions.

Many of the successful local programs funded by Byrne JAG will be eliminated if funding is not restored. For example, in Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, community policing and domestic violence prevention programs are at risk of being shut down. Also, in Charleston, West Virginia and surrounding towns, the funding cut threatens the jobs of two-thirds the Metro Drug Unit's officers. Finally, in California and Mississippi, several multijurisdictional drug task forces face massive funding cuts or shutting down completely. Once these anti-drug units shut down, it will take several years to reestablish the effective coordinated networks they have created. As these programs and task forces shrink and subside, drug traffickers and other criminal elements will be able to quickly wipe away the painstaking gains the partnership has delivered.

In closing, Federal Bureau of Investigation Director Robert Mueller has recognized that “national security is as much about reducing the number of homicides on our streets as it is about reducing the threat of terrorism.” A majority of your colleagues agree—218 Representatives and 56 Senators backed Director Mueller's words by signing letters asking that at least \$430 million for the Byrne JAG program be included in an upcoming emergency appropriations bill—an impressive show of bipartisan support for the importance and effectiveness of any program. We

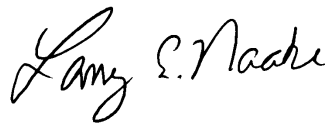
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ask that you join their call to protect our local law enforcement, our criminal justice system, and all Americans, by leading the effort to restore funding to this essential program.

Sincerely,



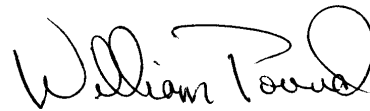
Donald J. Borut  
Executive Director  
National League of Cities



Larry E. Naake  
Executive Director  
National Association of Counties



Robert O'Neill  
Executive Director  
International City/County Management Association



William T. Pound  
Executive Director  
National Conference of State Legislatures

cc: The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
The Honorable John Boehner  
The Honorable Harry Reid  
The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
The Honorable Barbara Mikulski  
The Honorable Richard Shelby  
The Honorable Alan Mollohan  
The Honorable Rodney Frelinghuysen