

Congressman Dave Reichert (WA-08)

House Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies

Member's Day Hearing

Testimony for the Record

February 28, 2017

Thank you Chairman Culberson and Ranking Member Serrano for this opportunity to testify today before the subcommittee. As many of the members here know, prior to coming to Congress, I spent 33 years in law enforcement and was Sheriff of King County, Washington. From my experience, I know firsthand how important community policing is to reducing crime, keeping officers safe, and building trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve. That is why I'm here today to request your support for the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services and the many programs they administer – but especially the COPS Hiring Program.

The COPS Office has always enjoyed nearly universal support throughout the law enforcement field and among the major law enforcement stakeholder groups due to its dedicated mission to focus on strengthening and supporting law enforcement. With tensions between law enforcement officers and the communities they serve on the rise, I am concerned by any legislative or budget proposals that would jeopardize the work of the COPS Office. Now, more than ever, it is essential to support community policing efforts that build trust and mutual respect between cops and their communities.

While there are other agencies and programs within the Department of Justice focused on our criminal justice system at large, there are none with the extensive expertise and undivided focus on our nation's law enforcement officers like the COPS Office. The COPS Office is the only DOJ agency focused solely on advancing the critical mission of community policing.

For over two decades, the COPS Office has provided critical resources to local law enforcement agencies to advance community policing efforts that have reduced crime and made towns and cities across America safer. Drawing from this expertise and a vast network of resources, the COPS Office is unmatched in its ability to effectively administer grants where they are most needed. They do not award grants based off narratives but rather on data obtained directly from police departments across the nation, thus ensuring our limited federal resources are going to the communities with the greatest needs.

One of the most vital programs the COPS Office oversees is the COPS Hiring Program, which provides struggling communities with necessary funding to address staffing needs – which again, is especially important today as we've seen agencies struggle to recruit officers following a rise in targeted attacks on law enforcement. Staffing challenges for local law enforcement agencies not only jeopardize the safety of our men and women in uniform, but threaten the security of our families and exacerbate the breakdown in trust between law enforcement and community. Police departments must have the staff necessary to effectively engage with their communities and

proactively respond to their needs. Ensuring our communities are safe goes beyond running from one crime to the next.

Since its inception, the COPS Hiring Program has placed approximately 129,000 officers in communities across the United States to advance policing and crime prevention efforts. Studies have proven the effectiveness of this investment – showing that a modest investment in local policing through the COPS Hiring program led to a reduction in crime without a corresponding increase in incarceration rates. This is an important point to consider as Congress continues to look at sentencing reform – strong community policing through the COPS Office can go a long way towards achieving our goals. The COPS Hiring Program is not just a good return on investment, it is also vital to our nation's homeland security.

Local law enforcement officers are our first line of defense - they run towards danger, not away; they are the first to respond to acts of domestic terrorism, and they are increasingly tasked with additional duties in the national interest like drug enforcement and gang elimination efforts. The COPS Hiring Program has the proven ability to adapt and respond quickly to critical law enforcement incidents or emerging issues in the field, and have done so many times, including providing \$92 million to New York City shortly after 9/11 for officer hiring, and making hiring grants to Orlando, Dallas, and San Bernardino in the aftermath of mass shooting incidents.

Every day, the more than 900,000 sworn law enforcement officers across our nation put their lives on the line to keep each and every one of us safe. I hope you will join me in supporting them by continuing the COPS Hiring program and providing the funding necessary for the COPS Office to carry out their critical mission of advancing community policing.