United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

March 31, 2008

The Honorable Robert Byrd
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Thad Cochran
Ranking Member
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Byrd and Senator Cochran:

Restoration of severe cuts made to the Edward Byrne Justice Grant (Byrne/JAG) program through last year's omnibus appropriations bill is vital to avoid law enforcement layoffs and suspension of hundreds of anti-drug, gang and violent offender efforts across the country. Therefore, we respectfully request that you provide $489.6 million for the Edward Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (Byrne/JAG) program in any Supplemental Appropriations bill that comes before the Senate. This addition would restore Byrne/JAG funding to the same level previously approved by the Senate in the Commerce-Justice Science (CJS) Appropriations bill for fiscal year 2008 (FY 2008).

The Byrne Formula Grant Program is a tried and tested program that has served us well for more than two decades. The program's broad-based support was verified in the Senate's passage last year of S.231, the Feinstein-Chambliss Byrne/JAG Reauthorization Act, which would extend this $1.095 bill authorization through 2012. The bill received 52 co-sponsors and passed the Senate by unanimous consent.

As you know, the Senate-approved CJS Appropriations bill for FY2008 would have funded Byrne/JAG at $660 million. Following a veto threat, however, difficult choices had to be made in conference, and in the Omnibus Appropriations bill that ultimately passed, Byrne/JAG funding for FY2008 was reduced to only $170.4 million. This figure represented more than a 2/3 drop from Byrne/JAG's actual appropriated levels in FY2007.

In the wake of these drastic cuts, various law enforcement agencies, as well as numerous police and sheriff's offices, have notified us that these FY2008 Byrne/JAG cuts will have a devastating effect on law enforcement, forcing them to possibly close multi-jurisdictional drug and gang task forces, and negatively affecting a variety of other crime control programs. Particularly at a time when a risk of adverse economic conditions may lead to increased crime, it is vitally important that we support our nation's finest in their efforts on the front lines, where they risk their lives daily keeping Americans safe.

Unless these Byrne/JAG funds are restored promptly, law enforcement agencies may be forced to dismantle multi-jurisdiction task forces that often took years to create and develop.

And individual officers serving on those task force members will face a loss of income or even their jobs, some of which have been held for years.

Each year, Byrne/JAG dollars fund over 4,000 police officers and prosecutors working on over 750 drug enforcement task forces in all 50 states across hundreds of urban and rural countries and cities. On an annual basis, Byrne/JAG funding leads to over 220,000 arrests, 54,000 weapons seized, the seizure of 5.5 million grams of methamphetamine, and the breakup of almost 9,000 methamphetamine labs. These successes show that we need to continue what we are doing, not cut back.

Funding for Byrne/JAG, at its $1.095 billion authorized level, has long been supported by America's leading law enforcement organizations, including the National Narcotic Officers' Associations' Coalition, National Sheriffs' Association, National Association of Counties, National Association of State Alcohol and Drug Abuse Directors, Legal Action Center, National District Attorneys' Association, National HIDTA Directors Association, International Association of Chiefs of Police, Major County Sheriffs Association, National Criminal Justice Association, National Alliance of State Drug Enforcement Agencies, Major City Chiefs Association, National Troopers Coalition, State Association of Addiction Services, the National Crime Prevention Council and the Fraternal Order of Police.

There is strong bipartisan support for the Byrne/JAG Program, and we urge you to provide this critically needed funding in any supplemental appropriations bill that comes before the Senate this year.

Sincerely,

Dianne Feinstein
Kit Bond
Joe Biden
Orrin G. Hatch
Ted Kennedy
Olympia Snowe
Herb Kohl
Tom Harkin
Saxby Chambliss
Patrick Leahy
Chuck Grassley
Dick Durbin
Elizabeth Dole
Chuck Schumer

Ken Salazar

Barbara Boxer

Ben Cardin

Bill Nelson

Norm Coleman

Frank R. Lautenberg

Mark Pryor

Jim Webb

Hillary Rodham Clinton

cc:

The Honorable Barbara Mikulski
Chairman
Committee on Appropriations
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The Honorable Richard Shelby
Ranking Member
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