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MORE COPS FUNDING WILL NOT MEAN MORE COPS AND LESS CRIME

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Senator Joseph R. Biden (D-DE) has introduced a bill (S. 924) to reauthorize the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program and expand it to put an additional 50,000 officers on America's streets in order to reduce crime. As various studies by the U.S. government and independent groups have shown, however, the massive amount of tax dollars spent thus far on COPS—\$8.5 billion—has neither reduced violent crime nor succeeded in putting the promised 100,000 new officers on the beat. Rather than further funding a program that has yet to demonstrate its effectiveness, policymakers should promote policing activities that are known to reduce crime, such as targeting high-crime “hot spots” and the illegal possession of firearms by criminals.

Less Than 100,000 New COPS Officers. Despite recent claims, the COPS program has not put 100,000 additional officers on America's streets since it began in 1994. Even in 1999, the U.S. Department of Justice's own Office of Inspector General doubted that the goal could be reached; it estimated that, at most, only 59,765 additional officers would be added by the end of FY 2000. In its 2000 *National Evaluation of the COPS Program*, a report funded by the COPS Office and published by the Justice Department, the Urban Institute estimated that at the end of 1998, the program had increased the number of new officers nationwide by a net total of between 36,288 and 37,523; using an optimistic scenario, it further estimated that the number of officers added to the street by COPS

would peak at 57,175 by 2001.

Moreover, a study by The Heritage Foundation found that by 1998, only 39,617 officers had been added to the streets above the historical hiring trend from 1975 to 1993. Similarly, the Justice Department's Office of Inspector General found in 1999 that the program had counted officers as COPS-funded even when the law enforcement agencies receiving the grants had rejected the grants or had failed to hire all of the officers funded. For example, COPS officials claim that the Spokane Police Department had hired 56 new officers based on three COPS grants worth \$4.2 million, but the Spokane Police Department said that it had hired only 25 officers. Nevertheless, COPS officials counted the 31 “missing” officers in the total number of additional officers it supposedly put on the streets.

Failure to Reduce Violent Crime. When Senator Biden introduced his bill, he claimed that “The COPS program is a proven success. Crime has declined every year since the COPS program has been in existence and violent crime is at its lowest level in a generation.” This is simply incorrect. The

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nation's violent crime rate began to decline in 1991—three years before the program was created. Not only did COPS *not* start the national drop in crime, but research now indicates that since its inception, it has not helped to reduce crime.

Analysts in The Heritage Foundation's Center for Data Analysis (CDA) found this to be the case after examining the effects of COPS grants on violent crime rates in 752 counties from 1995 to 1998. After accounting for socioeconomic factors, the COPS hiring and redeployment grants—its primary components—failed to show a statistically measurable effect in reducing violent crime rates at the county level. The CDA analysis suggests that simply bolstering funding for the COPS program will be ineffective in reducing violent crime. Based on experience, there are two reasons for this:

1. The actual number of officers funded by these grants and added to the street will be substantially less than the funding level would indicate, and
2. Merely paying for the operational expenses of law enforcement agencies without a clear crime-fighting objective will continue to be ineffective in reducing violent crime.

Failure to Promote Effective Crime-Fighting Strategies. The CDA analysis also found that COPS grants targeted toward reducing specific activities—like domestic violence, youth firearm violence, and gangs—are more effective than hiring and redeployment grants in reducing violent crime. Narrowly focused COPS grants are intended to help law enforcement agencies tackle specific problems, while COPS hiring and redeployment grants are intended simply to pay for operational costs and thus are less likely to target specific problems.

According to a 1997 Justice Department review of crime-fighting programs entitled *Preventing Crime: What Works, What Doesn't, What's Promising*, community policing with no clear strategy for targeting crime-risk factors—such as high-crime “hot spots” and illegal firearms possession—has been ineffective in reducing crime. “While the COPS Program language has stressed a community policing approach,” the report states, “there is no evidence that community policing *per se* reduces crime without a clear focus on a crime risk factor objective.” The legislative efforts to continue funding the program fail to promote policing activities that are known to reduce crime, such as targeting hot spots and illegal firearms possession by criminals, as well as proactively targeting repeat offenders, which increases the likelihood of the arrest and incarceration of dangerous criminals.

Conclusion. Senator Biden's S. 924 would authorize spending an additional \$6.9 billion over six years to fund an expanded COPS program. It also would eliminate the current provision in law that recipients of COPS grants continue to employ COPS officers after federal funding is expended, paying them out of their own resources, and require that up to 50 percent of the federal funds reserved for officer salaries be directed to agencies whose original grants have expired.

In essence, this change in the law would create a new federal obligation to fund local officers' salaries—tantamount to establishing a new federal entitlement for localities. Such measures should clearly be avoided. Policymakers should promote effective policing activities, not merely increase funding for a program that has failed to achieve its goals.

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