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Attorneys General Urge Congress: Protect Enforcement Programs, Crime Victims Fund

Missouri Attorney General Jay Nixon and the Attorneys General of 51 other states, territories and the District of Columbia are urging Congressional leaders to restore federal funding for several key state and local law enforcement assistance programs and to safeguard the federal Crime Victims Fund from losing more than \$1 billion for crime victims' services.

Jefferson City, MO – *infoZine* – The Attorneys General, working through the National Association of Attorneys General, sent a letter on April 28 to leaders of both parties in the U.S. House and Senate to high ranking members of the appropriations committees on both bodies.

The Bush Administration's proposed FY 2007 budget for the Department of Justice eliminates or reduces a number of key state and local law enforcement assistance programs, including elimination of the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (JAG) program and restructuring and reducing the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program by almost 72 percent.

“These law enforcement cuts could not have come at a worse time for the states and territories,” the Attorneys General wrote. “Significant budget problems still face state and territorial legislatures. At the same time, the states and territories are reeling from the explosion in heroin, prescription narcotic and methamphetamine abuse. The proposed reductions to the state, territorial and local law enforcement assistance programs administered by the Department of Justice will, if enacted, significantly reduce the ability of state, territorial and local law enforcement agencies to protect communities across the nation.”

The letter pointed out that in 2004, task forces funded in part by Byrne/JAG were responsible for busting more than 5,600 meth labs, and seizing more than 54,000 weapons and large quantities of powder cocaine, crack, heroin, meth and marijuana. The COPS program also helped local law enforcement with funding through its Methamphetamine Hotspots programs.

Several other organizations also have asked Congress to protect funding for state and local law enforcement efforts, including the National Criminal Justice Association, the National Narcotics Officers Association, the National Sheriffs' Association, the National District Attorneys Association, the National Association of Counties and the International Association of Chiefs of Police.

Nixon and the other Attorneys General also asked Congressional leaders to reject Bush Administration proposals to rescind the entire balance – \$1.255 billion – of the federal Crime Victims Fund. The fund was created as part of the Victims of Crime Act of 1984 (VOCA) and is funded entirely through collections from federal criminal fines, forfeitures and special assessments.

“These offender-generated revenues, with no additional amounts provided by taxpayers, are used to support approximately 4,400 local programs to provide counseling, shelter, support and advocacy to nearly 4 million victims of domestic violence, sexual assault, child abuse, drunk driving, elder abuse and robberies, as well as families of homicide victims and other victims of crime,” the letter says.

“Preservation of the Crime Victims Fund is critical to our efforts to serve victims in our communities. Without the assistance provided through VOCA grants, we will be unable to provide the services necessary to help victims of crime recover physically, emotionally and financially. No victim of crime should be left without the means to overcome the horrific acts committed against them. Use of funds that directly connect offenders to victims for general fund purposed should not be permitted because it minimizes both the responsibilities of offenders and the substantial injustices that must be overcome by victims,” the letter continued.

Other organizations that also have asked Congress to keep the funding for the Crime Victims Fund include the National Center for Victims of Crime and Parents of Murdered Children.

In 2005, Nixon and the other Attorneys General also sent a letter asking Congress to not rescind the balance of the Crime Victims’ Fund, as proposed by the Administration. Congress rejected the plan to rescind the balances at that time.

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