2008 ECONOMIC DOWNTURN AND FEDERAL INACTION IMPACT ON CRIME

Mayors and Police Chiefs
124 Cities Report to The Nation

Philadelphia
August 6, 2008

Manuel A. (Manny) Diaz
Mayor of Miami
President
The U.S. Confernce of Mayors

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FOREWORD

At the direction of Conference President and Miami Mayor Manuel A. (Manny) Diaz, The U.S. Conference of Mayors is holding five '08 Mayors' Action Forums between early August and early October in which America's mayors will forge an action agenda for cities and metro areas to present to the next President of the United States. The five national events in five cities across the country are intended to prepare the Conference to present the next President with a set of priorities for action on urban/suburban problems that can be taken during the first 100 days of the new administration. The forums cover crime, infrastructure, poverty, arts, and the environment.

The first forum, August 5 and 6 in Philadelphia, focuses on crime. Mayors and police chiefs from cities across the nation are developing a detailed anti-crime agenda – an agenda intended to renew a badly needed national initiative against crime and violence. The mayors and chiefs will engage in an open discussion in which they will identify key crime problems in cities, what cities are doing or need to do to address them, and what federal action is needed.

According to a Zogby poll released at the Conference's Winter Meeting in January of this year, the American people today are more concerned about street crime and neighborhood criminals than international terrorists. In his inaugural address to the Conference of Mayors, President Diaz discussed some of the crime problems our cities face, in particular youth violence, and asked: "Is crime a local problem? Or is it an American problem?"

We know going into the Philadelphia meeting that while some cities had a small decrease in violent crime last year, others saw increases. The statistics for 2007 are preliminary, but in 2006, many cities saw double-digit increases in murder, assaults, and robberies. The FBI estimates there are 800,000 gang members nationwide, more than the total number of state and local law enforcement officers. Thirty thousand Americans are killed every year as a result of gun violence, and the recent Supreme Court decision striking down the D.C. gun ban will do nothing to reduce that number. Our police officers and the people they serve are under attack by criminals using assault weapons and ridiculous loopholes in the gun sales check system continue unaddressed. In America's cities today, the police are out-manned and out-gunned.

In preparation for the Philadelphia Action Forum, The U.S. Conference of Mayors conducted a brief survey of mayors and police chiefs to identify key issues relating to crime in cities today. Responses were received from 124 cities in 36 states and Puerto Rico. In recent months we have seen anecdotal evidence of the impact that the current economic downturn and the high cost of fuel is having on public services, including law enforcement. This report takes us a step beyond the anecdotes and provides a snapshot of current issues relating to crime and policing, including the impact of economic downturn and energy problems.

Tom Cochran
CEO and Executive Director
August 6, 2008

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In preparation for the August 5-6, 2008, '08 Mayors' Action Forum on Crime in Philadelphia, The U.S. Conference of Mayors conducted a brief survey of mayors and police chiefs to identify key issues relating to crime in cities today. The cities range in size from Los Angeles with a population of nearly 3.7 million, to Morristown (TN) with a population of 25,800. Responses were received from 124 cities in 36 states and Puerto Rico. Among the findings:

- More than four in 10 of the survey cities (42 percent) report that they are seeing increased crime as a result of current economic conditions.

- Nearly three in 10 cities (29 percent) report an increase in crime resulting from the mortgage foreclosure crisis and the increase in the number of vacant and abandoned properties.

- Nearly half (46 percent) of the survey cities report that the increase in the cost of gasoline has had a significant or very significant effect on their police department. Another 46 percent say it has had a moderate effect.

- As a group, the survey cities report that they currently have a total of 62,157 police officers. This is an average of 8.6 percent fewer officers than they had at their peak. The cities also report that to achieve the realistic, ideal number of officers their departments should have would require a 13.75 percent average increase. Using this percentage to project the magnitude of this increase nationwide, an additional 92,316 officers are needed in local police, sheriffs' and special jurisdiction departments.

- One-half of the survey cities report that they have experienced an increase in violence among young people over the last year. This violence has manifested itself most frequently in gang violence, street crime, school violence, and gun violence.

- Drug-related crimes were cited most frequently by the survey cities as their single biggest crime problem. This was followed by larcenies and thefts, property crimes, and automobile thefts or automobile-related crimes.

SURVEY FINDINGS

The Impact of Current Economic Conditions on Crime

More than four in 10 of the survey cities (42 percent) report that they are seeing increased crime as a result of current economic conditions. In an open-ended question, these cities were asked to describe the types of crimes that are being driven by economic problems. Most frequently cited were:

- Robbery, by 39 percent of the cities;
- Theft, by 31 percent;
- Burglary, by 29 percent;
- Crimes involving scrap and/or precious metals, by 29 percent;
- Property crimes, by 14 percent;
- Larceny, by 12 percent;
- Thefts involving cars, by 12 percent;
- Drug-related crimes, by 10 percent;
- Crimes involving firearms, by eight percent; and
- Gasoline theft, by eight percent.

Among the cities' specific comments:

- **Westland, MI:** Larceny from automobiles, specifically for scrap metal; larceny of gasoline (also know as drive-offs), and the pawning of stolen property to buy drugs are all activities believed to be a result of current economic conditions.
- **Lewisville, TX:** We've experienced thefts of gasoline drained from gas tanks by persons drilling into the tanks from underneath to defeat the anti-siphon engineering of the fuel nozzle. Robberies are up only slightly for the calendar year (5.1 percent) and might be so as a result of the economy. Copper thefts continue to be on the rise as well.
- **Miami, FL:** There is a significant increase in property crimes such as burglaries and thefts, some of which are driven by the increased costs of metals. Also, robbery has increased over the past year.
- **Dayton, OH:** Burglaries (involving metal thefts in particular) have increased in the city overall and robberies have increased in some areas.
- **North Miami, FL:** We have seen a notable increase in thefts throughout our city. Although the current economic conditions are a contributing factor, we cannot determine to what extent. Some of the specific crime trends we have recently seen involve thefts of copper form A/C units, thefts of backflow valves, and thefts of catalytic converters from vehicles.

The Impact of the Mortgage Foreclosure Crisis and Increase in Vacant and Abandoned Properties on Crime

Nearly three in 10 cities (29 percent) report an increase in crime resulting from the mortgage foreclosure crisis and the increase in the number of vacant and abandoned properties it has produced. In an open-ended question, these cities were asked to describe the types of crimes they were seeing. Most frequently noted were:

- Burglary, by 47 percent of these cities;
- Crimes involving scrap and precious metals, by 27 percent;
- Vandalism, by 23 percent;
- Arson, by 20 percent;
- Blight, code violations and/or quality-of-life crimes, by 13 percent.
- Theft, by 10 percent; and
- Crimes involving drug use, by 10 percent.

Among the cities' specific comments:

- **Westland, MI:** These types of crimes include increased vandalism, breaking and entering, and "blight" issues such as litter and rodent problems, high grass and noxious weeds. In fact, last year an ordinance was put into effect which has curbed the problem of high grass and weeds.
- **Oxnard, CA:** Foreclosed homes do create blight in neighborhoods because they are not maintained. They attract juveniles who use the homes for underage drinking.
- **Miami, FL:** As properties are foreclosed, especially condos, we are seeing increasing burglaries related to unoccupied apartments and construction sites.
- **Hilo, HI:** We are seeing an increase in burglaries and suspected arsons involving vacant homes as a result of the inability of homeowners to sell properties.
- **Hemet, CA:** We have neighborhoods that still have residents living in the homes that are being foreclosed upon. Those residents are lowering the quality of life by having loud parties, vandalizing the community, and committing other minor crimes. We are also finding that owners are willing to drop rent prices or tenant screening, which in one case led to a major marijuana seizure this week.
- **North Miami, FL:** We have had issues with burglaries and trespassing violations at vacant and abandoned properties. In addition, these vacant properties have been vandalized and used as a hangout for derelicts and drug users.
- **Lima, OH:** We have seen increases in arson, property vandalism, theft of salvageable materials, and nuisance-related code enforcement matters.

The Impact of Gasoline Cost Increases on Police Departments

Forty-six percent of the survey cities report that the increase in the cost of gasoline has had a significant or very significant effect on their police department. Another 46 percent say it has had a moderate effect. In an open-ended question, these cities were asked to describe any operational or budgetary changes they have made in the police department as a result of this increased cost. Most frequently cited were:

- Cutting other parts of the police department's budget, by 24 percent of the cities which have instituted changes;
- Changing vehicle idling policies to reduce fuel use, by 22 percent of the cities;
- Increasing the number of two-officer patrols, by 18 percent;
- Changing policies regarding take-home vehicles, by 19 percent;
- Purchasing more fuel-efficient or alternative-fuel vehicles, by 14 percent;
- Increasing bicycle and/or Segway patrols, by 13 percent; and
- Increasing foot patrols, by 11 percent.

In addition, five cities – Riverside, CA; Honolulu, HI; La Crosse, WI; Lombard, IL; and Bolingbrook, IL – said increased fuel costs were affecting hiring policies, and two said they were restricting the use of overtime.

Among the cities' specific comments:

- **Buffalo, NY:** We are seeking to reduce the number of take-home vehicles. Patrol vehicles are Crown Victorias, and the large engine is not fuel efficient. We have switched detective vehicles to the Ford Fusion, a more efficient model.
- **Stockton, CA:** We are relocating moneys from other areas used for other crime-fighting resources/programs to pay for gas.
- **Honolulu, HI:** A major budgetary restriction requires changes in operations and hiring strategies.
- **Lewisville, TX:** When the current fiscal year concludes, the police department budget for fuel is expected to be double the amount budgeted. The police department has implemented measures to conserve fuel such as limiting idling, doubling up officers at times, and requiring each officer during each shift to spend 15 minutes without the vehicle running each day. (It's our attempt to turn this negative into a positive by expanding our community policing efforts. Officers are to contact someone new each time they are forced out of the vehicle – a business person or resident – to see if there are any services we can provide them or to gather crime tips.)
- **Columbus, OH:** We have to ground our helicopter before the end of the year. Also, additional funds for gas come from other important projects.
- **Pocatello, ID:** Review and reduction of discretionary training has occurred. Implementation of fuel reduction and consumption levels to include the elimination of specialty vehicles. Some reductions of overtime that is not operationally oriented.
- **Riverside, CA:** During the past year the cost of fuel has had a significant impact, exceeding the budget by $175,000, a 20 percent increase. The Police Department was not budgeted sufficiently for fuels and is expected to exceed its appropriation by $200,000. Civilian support positions will go vacant to help offset this cost along with other cost saving measures such as reduced services to community policing and other special assignments in order to redeploy officers to the field. Officers have been encouraged to fuel at the Magnolia station to help reduce costs, since there is a surcharge of $0.35 at the city operated tanks. When possible, training classes are being made available in Riverside rather than traveling to other locations. Many purchases, including all vehicles, have been cut from the budget.
- **Tucson, AZ:** The Tucson Police Department began a four-month pilot study on August 1, 2008, to evaluate whether two-officer patrol units save fuel without impacting service delivery. The Department is also looking into other areas to minimize fuel consumption.
- **Bell, CA:** Automotive expenses have nearly tripled, thereby delaying the replacement of older vehicles.
- **Oakland, CA:** Police units no longer can be parked idling and we are working on a program to park units during each shift.
- **Biloxi, MS:** Each patrol shift has instituted one two-officer car per shift, which allows one car per shift to be parked. Both sworn and unsworn employees have been instructed and are making a conscious effort to reduce gas consumption by turning off parked vehicles, rather than letting them idle. Tires are being checked for proper inflation as part of routine fluid checks. The number of miles that some of the larger, less fuel-efficient vehicles are being driven has been reduced. Shift captains are regularly reviewing the miles-per-gallon figures for their shift in an attempt to identify those officers whose driving habits could be improved.

- **Merced, CA:** Fuel budget is up; funding for personnel is down.
- **Meridian, MS:** Motors are turned off on patrol vehicles on stops and at accident scenes, but lights remain on.
- **Bristol, CT:** Instead of allowing extra assigned officers to take a patrol car, we are doubling up in cars. This decreases patrol coverage and response times, but saves on fuel costs.
- **La Crosse, WI:** We have delayed filling some positions.

Police Officer Staffing Levels

The 124 cities included in the survey currently have a total of 62,157 police officers. This number represents an average 8.6 percent decline from the 68,026 officers these cities had at the peak of their staffing level. The cities said that the realistic, ideal number of officers that their departments should have is 70,704, an average 13.75 percent increase over the current level.

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, there were 671,390 sworn law enforcement officers in local police, sheriffs' and special jurisdiction departments in 2004 (the most recent year for which data are available).[1] Increasing that number by the rate called for by the survey cities – 13.75 percent – would mean that an additional 92,316 sworn officers are needed to bring local departments nationwide to their realistic, ideal staffing level.

Youth Violence

One-half of the survey cities report that they have seen an increase in violence among young people over the last year. In an open-ended question, the cities were asked to identify the areas in which that increase has manifested itself. Most frequently cited were:

- Gang violence, by 51 percent of the cities;
- Street crime, by 31 percent;
- School violence, by 21 percent;
- Gun violence, by 15 percent;
- Assaults, by 10 percent; and
- Drug-related crimes, by nine percent.

Among the cities' specific comments:

- **Buffalo, NY:** Gangs are in almost every neighborhood. This has led to more violence in schools. Youth are committing more street crimes, such as robberies and shootings.
- **Westland, MI:** This issue has manifested itself in our schools, yet we are handling this proactively with the placement of a school resource officer inside our high schools full time. This has proven to discourage violent activity.
- **Boston, MA:** The average age of suspects and victims has decreased by about two years. There is more gang-related and street crime among a younger age group.
- **Dayton, OH:** Homicides are currently up 40 percent, and armed robberies and felonious assaults are up in some parts of the city. About 30 percent of the homicides of the past three and one-half years are "group member involved," meaning that they involve identifiable groups (not necessarily gangs) that are driving gun violence offenses.

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[1] Law Enforcement Statistics, Bureau of Justice Statistics, (http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/bjs/lawenf.htm#summary)

- **Norwalk, CT:** Mainly in pockets of neighborhood street gangs. The violence is generally directed at gang members from other neighborhoods. A homicide of one youth will usually result in retaliatory action against young people in a rival gang.
- **Cheltenham Township, PA:** This is especially prevalent with teenage females. Normally a large number of the assaults are school-related. Females seem more inclined to violence than ever before.

Cities' Biggest Crime Problems

The city officials were asked, in an open-ended question, to identify their single biggest crime problem. Some cities listed more than one type of crime. Most frequently described were:

- Drug-related crimes, by one-fourth of the cities;
- Larcenies and thefts, by 21 percent;
- Property crimes, by 19 percent;
- Automobile thefts, or automobile-related crimes, by 13 percent;
- Assaults, by nine percent;
- Robberies, by eight percent;
- Gang-related crimes, by seven percent
- Homicides, by six percent;
- Burglaries, by six percent; and
- Street crimes, by six percent.

Among the cities' comments:

- **San Antonio, TX:** While there can be no absolute value given to the impact of violent crimes, the sheer number of property crimes – in particular burglary of vehicles – makes it our biggest crime problem.
- **Colorado Springs, CO:** One of the single highest contributing factors to a wide variety of crime types in the Colorado Springs community is substance abuse. Drug and alcohol abuse contribute significantly to our crime on many levels. Individuals abusing methamphetamine will break into vehicles, homes and businesses in order to obtain the means to support their addiction. Alcohol and/or drug abuse is a very common factor in reports of domestic violence. The drug trade, with rival gangs competing for their territory, contributes to gang violence in this area as evidenced in two gang-related murders in Colorado Springs this year.
- **Columbus, OH:** Obviously, violent crime by its nature is always the major concern. However, from a quantity standpoint, theft from autos is one of the most significant.
- **Orlando, FL:** We continue to see a rise in crime committed by juveniles. We are currently looking into strategies that will help at-risk juveniles stay on a positive course.
- **Tucson, AZ:** Increased border enforcement is causing Mexican drug cartels and their criminal associates to move away from the border areas and commit violence in Tucson.
- **Lorain, OH:** The biggest crime problem is larcenies (theft from cars, theft of copper, etc.). A worse problem is drug use and trafficking, which is directly related to violence, gang activity, and most other crimes.
- **Lincoln, NE:** Larceny from automobiles is the largest dollar loss. Robbery, specifically street robbery, is the crime of most concern due to its increasing trend.

SURVEY CITIES

Huntsville	AL	Miami	FL
Mobile	AL	North Miami	FL
Chandler	AZ	Orlando	FL
Tucson	AZ	Pembroke Pines	FL
North Little Rock	AR	Port St. Lucie	FL
Bell	CA	Hilo	HI
Beverly Hills	CA	Honolulu	HI
Garden Grove	CA	Pocatello	ID
Gardena	CA	Arlington Heights	IL
Hemet	CA	Bartlett	IL
La Verne	CA	Bolingbrook	IL
Los Angeles	CA	Carpentersville	IL
Merced	CA	Glenview	IL
Oakland	CA	Lombard	IL
Oxnard	CA	Normal	IL
Pleasanton	CA	Northbrook	IL
Riverside	CA	Oak Lawn	IL
Rohnert Park	CA	Palatine	IL
San Francisco	CA	Springfield	IL
San Leandro	CA	New Albany	IN
San Luis Obispo	CA	Louisville	KY
San Ramon	CA	Annapolis	MD
Santa Ana	CA	Baltimore	MD
Stockton	CA	Boston	MA
Tracy	CA	Fitchburg	MA
West Hollywood	CA	Southfield	MI
Whittier	CA	Westland	MI
Colorado Springs	CO	Burnsville	MN
Bristol	CT	Biloxi	MS
East Hartford	CT	Meridian	MS
Fairfield	CT	Kansas City	MO
New Haven	CT	Lincoln	NE
Norwalk	CT	Manchester	NH
Stamford	CT	Camden	NJ
West Haven	CT	East Orange	NJ
Clearwater	FL	Fair Lawn	NJ
Hallandale Beach	FL	Jackson	NJ
Largo	FL	Linden	NJ

Paterson	NJ	Carolina	PR
Piscataway	NJ	Providence	RI
Trenton	NJ	Woonsocket	RI
Albuquerque	NM	Germantown	TN
Santa Fe	NM	Kingsport	TN
Buffalo	NY	Morristown	TN
Rochester	NY	Bryan	TX
Durham	NC	Deer Park	TX
Greenville	NC	Frisco	TX
Cleveland	OH	Haltom City	TX
Columbus	OH	Lewisville	TX
Dayton	OH	North Richland Hills	TX
Hamilton	OH	San Antonio	TX
Lima	OH	Burlington	VT
Lorain	OH	Alexandria	VA
Toledo	OH	Auburn	WA
Upper Arlington	OH	Seattle	WA
Broken Arrow	OK	Tacoma	WA
Tulsa	OK	Yakima	WA
Portland	OR	Beloit	WI
Allentown	PA	La Crosse	WI
Cheltenham Township	PA	Racine	WI
Chester	PA	Waukesha	WI
Philadelphia	PA	Casper	WY