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CONGRESSWOMAN LAURA RICHARDSON OF CALIFORNIA

COMMITTEE ON APPROPRIATIONS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON COMMERCE, JUSTICE, AND SCIENCE

HEARING:
“MEMBER AND OUTSIDE WITNESS FY2012 APPROPRIATIONS PRIORITIES”

FRIDAY, MARCH 11, 2010
10:00 A.M.

I would like to thank Chairman Wolf and Ranking Member Fattah for the opportunity to appear before the House Appropriations Committee’s Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and Science and share some of my appropriations priorities for Fiscal Year 2012.

As we begin to recover from the deepest recession since the Great Depression it is important that our spending decisions reflect the need for investments that strengthen our fragile recovery, as well as the seriousness of our mounting federal deficit. However, it is my belief that we cannot afford to underfund critical efforts to keep our communities safe and economically prosperous. I am here to stress the importance of robustly funding a number of community safety, criminal justice, economic development, and science research programs that are important not only to the 37th District of California, which I proudly represent, but also to the shared interests of our nation.

Cities across the country, specifically those in urban areas like the cities of Long Beach, Compton, and Carson in my district, rely upon efficient, well-funded criminal justice systems to keep drugs and guns off the streets, keep our children and schools safe, and hold bad actors accountable. Over the years, a number of Department of Justice (DOJ) programs have proven exceptionally important in our efforts to protect our communities and the families that inhabit them. One such program is the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program, which provides assistance to state and local law enforcement agencies to help reduce crime. Another is the Debbie

Smith DNA Backlog Grant Program, which provides funds to help eliminate backlogs at crime labs and bring assailants to justice.

Unfortunately, the President's FY2012 Budget Request looks to reduce DOJ grants to state and local authorities for criminal justice programs by \$588 million. While I applaud the President's efforts to tackle our federal deficit, I do not support these cuts. I believe it is critical that we provide law enforcement authorities the resources that they need to protect the public safety and reduce crime.

In addition to funding efforts to reduce crime, we must also ensure that protections and services are available to aid the victims of crime. Our spending priorities are, fundamentally, a reflection of our national values, and I believe that as Americans we should always work to protect the most vulnerable members of our society and provide aid for innocent individuals whose rights have been violated. Initiatives such as the Violence against Women Act's (VAWA) STOP Formula Grant Program, the Sexual Assault Services Program, the Transitional Housing Assistance Grant Program, and the Jessica Gonzales Victim Assistance Program provide funds that help prevent cases of domestic abuse, as well as assist assault victims in finding safety and accessing recovery services. These programs represent the first line of defense and the first responders for many vulnerable populations, and the consequences of underfunding them would be dire.

I was pleased to see that the President's budget requests \$591 million to combat violence against women in the United States. I strongly support this funding increase. Again, I agree that the federal government must tighten its belt in areas where we can afford to do so, but trimming the budget cannot occur on the backs of those desperate for support. I urge the members of this subcommittee to meet the President's goal of funding vitally important criminal justice programs that protect and rehabilitate victims of assault and abuse.

Keeping our communities safe, however, demands not only response services, but also preventative measures. I have always believed that prisoner reentry programs are a key way to reduce crime. The recidivism rate in the United States is an intolerable 67 percent. This is because too many prisoners are released from prison without the networks of support or marketable skill sets needed to succeed economically, causing them to fall back into lives of crime and perpetuate the revolving door between the streets and the cell blocks. That is why I support robust funding for prisoner reentry programs like those authorized by the Second Chance Act, a bill that was passed with overwhelming bipartisan support in 2008.

In the 111th Congress I introduced (and will soon be reintroducing) the Cooking Helps Elevate Futures (CHEF) Act, a bill that aims to reduce re-incarceration rates by setting up programs to equip inmates with culinary skills that they can use to achieve gainful employment upon their release. If the CHEF Act were to be signed into law, I would hope to see this program receive full funding. Helping the formerly incarcerated stay on the right side of the law is in everyone's interest: doing so improves lives, strengthens communities and families, and removes a heavy financial burden from taxpayers.

In addition to funding programs that reduce crime, strengthening our community also requires investments in cutting edge science and technology with the potential to improve quality of life across the country. I support full funding for the National Science Foundation (NSF), which will allow NSF and universities to sustain and expand

their vital research and education programs, which range from improving science education to developing multimedia technologies that improve telemedicine. It is time to increase funding for academic research, which is critical to innovation and drives the competitiveness and general well-being of our nation.

Finally, I support robust funding for the NASA budget. NASA's mission to explore the unknown and answer basic questions about space and the natural world has enormous and tangible implications for our lives. NASA's mission is a key part of the President's goal of out-innovating the rest of the world and has the potential to yield new insights for ongoing problems such as global warming and create thousands of jobs. NASA is also committed to investing millions of dollars in STEM education, helping to ensure that our global competitiveness remains a top priority.

All of these investments are vitally important for our public safety and economic security. The above programs have substantial records of success at keeping our communities safe and creating jobs—two of our most critical obligations as a government. Underfunding these programs will have lasting negative impacts on the lives of thousands of Americans. Conversely, appropriate funding levels for these important programs will lay the foundation to ensure that we have strong communities and a strong economy now and for future generations.

I thank Chairman Wolf, Ranking Member Fattah, and the members of the Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, and Science for the opportunity to testify on my appropriations priorities for Fiscal Year 2012.