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LARSON SUPPORTS LAW ENFORCEMENT PRIORITIES

WASHINGTON, D.C.- U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) today announced his support for two legislative and budget priorities to aid and strengthen law enforcement. Larson called for continued funding for the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) program under the Department of Justice, and co-sponsored legislation that would criminalize the use of protective body armor by criminals during a crime, and would prohibit the purchase or possession of body armor by violent felons.

Larson, who is a member of the Congressional Law Enforcement Caucus, signed a letter to the President strongly urging him to maintain funding for the COPS program in the Administration's budget for fiscal year 2002. Since its inception in 1994 under President Clinton, the program has funded 110,000 new police officers through a series of grant programs to more than 12,000 law enforcement agencies, reaching roughly 87% of the country.

The COPS program has provided the First District with a total of \$17 million dollars to hire nearly 300 officers since 1994. Between 1998 and 2000, the District received more than \$7.7 million dollars and hired 142 officers. COPS grant programs include the Universal Hiring Program, which pays for a portion of a new officer's salary for a period of three years for each department that receives a grant. The program also funds the COPS in Schools program, which allows local police departments to hire School Resource Officers, who work within schools to teach crime prevention and substance-abuse classes, monitor troubled students, and help build respect

for law enforcement. The program combines both law enforcement and education to best serve the students.

"I believe that a great deal of the credit for the drop in crime rates we have seen in the last few years should be given to the COPS program, and the more than 100,000 new police officers it hired to work in our communities, neighborhoods and schools," said Larson. "Since 1994, this program has given thousands of law enforcement agencies the resources that they need to help ensure that our streets, homes and families are as safe as possible. To weaken the program by under funding it would be an invitation to roll back the advances law enforcement has made against crime in the last several years."

Larson also announced his support for the James Guelff Body Armor Act of 2001, a measure sponsored by Representatives Bart Stupak (MI-01), Asa Hutchinson (AR-03) and Bobby Scott (VA-03) named for a San Francisco police officer killed in the line of duty in 1994 by a gunman wearing a bulletproof vest and a Kevlar helmet, both of which are types of body armor. The legislation would add criminal penalties when someone uses body armor while committing a violent crime or engaging in drug trafficking. The legislation would also prohibit violent criminals from buying or owning body armor as well as allowing Federal agencies such as the FBI, DEA, ATF and INS to donate surplus body armor to local law enforcement agencies.

"The idea that a criminal could have any material advantage over a law enforcement officer, whether it be in terms of firepower or body protection, is outrageous and unacceptable," said Larson. "I am a strong supporter of this legislation because it will prevent criminals from having material advantages over police officers by banning the possession of armor by violent felons and drug dealers, as well as help safeguard the lives of officers through the donation of existing body armor."

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