



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on July 30, 2009

COPS, DHS On 'Stimulus' Patrol

The federal Community Oriented Police Services, or COPS program, has given police departments across the country something to "CHRP" about with the awarding of \$1 billion in economic stimulus grants. (CHRP is the COPS Hiring Recovery Program.)

The money, part of the \$795 billion American Recovery and Reinvestment Act passed by Congress earlier this year, will be funneled into the COPS Hiring Recovery Program under the U.S. Department of Justice. The funds will go to "state, local and tribal law enforcement to create and/or preserve nearly 5,000 law enforcement positions," according to the DOJ web site. The grants cover a three-year period and each department accepting the money must commit to retaining officers hired under the program for a fourth year as well.



Vice president Joe Biden and Attorney General Eric Holder announced the grants on Tuesday, July 28, in Philadelphia, one of several large cities that will each receive enough money to fund 50 police officers. "We can't achieve the goal of stronger communities without supporting those who keep our streets safe," Biden said. But New York was left out of the COPS funding, much to the chagrin of city officials. The Department of Homeland Security, however, announced on Wednesday that \$35 million for the city's police officers would be dispersed through the department's Transit Security program.

"This will put more than 120 new cops on our trains and buses and will be a shot in the arm for New York's successful fight against crime," said Senator Charles E. Schumer (D-M.Y.), who worked with Homeland Security officials to ensure that the money could be used to hire police officers. The DHS, created by Congress after the 9/11 attacks to deal with threats to the nation's security, has frequently issued grants for purchases of equipment and other assistance to local police and fire departments.

The COPS program began in the first term of the Clinton administration with the goal of putting an additional "100,000 cops on the street." It is designed to change the way policing is done in local communities by moving officers away from the traditional "call-and-respond" pattern in favor of a more pro-active role in meeting with residents in neighborhood centers and working to identify and eliminate problems before they occur. Some police departments have used the money to put officers in schools to prevent criminal or disruptive behavior there.

But the program has been criticized for years over accountability of funds. A *USA Today* report in 2005 noted federal audits of the program at various locations found more than \$277 million in misspent funds. Thousands of jobs that were funded were not filled or filled only for a short time. The money has also been used in some cases to pay for officers already on the force, or for equipment, computers and administrative personnel instead of "cops on the street." In Novinger, Missouri, former police chief



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Charles Middleton was sentenced to two years' probation and ordered to pay \$53,000 in restitution in 2002 after auditors accused him of using grant money to pay his salary and give himself a \$6,000 raise.

The requirement to keep officers for one year beyond the life of the grant has also been a problem for some municipalities that used COPS money to create more positions than they could later afford. That in turn has led to pressure on Congress from mayors and police chiefs to reauthorize the program.

An analysis of the COPS Improvement Act of 2009 by the Heritage Foundation claims the program undermines fiscal responsibility at state and local levels by increasing dependence on the federal government for the funding of routine law enforcement operations. The growing federal role also raises constitutional issues, say the study's authors, David B. Mulhausen and Brian W. Walsh.

"These federal grants do not vindicate any unique role or responsibility that the Constitution has assigned to the federal government," they wrote.



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