March 3, 2008

Via Facsimile
The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
U.S. House of Representatives
H-232, The Capitol
Washington, D.C.  20515

The Honorable John Boehner
Minority Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
H-204, The Capitol
Washington, D.C.  20515

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
United States Senate
S-221, The Capitol
Washington, D.C.  20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States Senate
S-230, The Capitol
Washington, D.C.  20510

To The Leadership of Congress:

We the undersigned Attorneys General, write to express our concern about the severe cuts to the Edward Byrne Justice Assistance Grants (Byrne/JAG) that were contained in the FY 2008 omnibus appropriations bill. We also write to ask that you restore the funding that was cut.

The Senate had funded the FY 2008 Byrne/JAG program at $660 million and the House at $600 million in each of their respective appropriations bills. The omnibus bill that was enacted into law, however, cut the Byrne/JAG program by 67% of its FY 2007 funding level, from $520 million to $170 million. These funding cuts will devastate state law enforcement efforts if they are not restored in this year’s supplemental appropriations bill.

Byrne/JAG funds a variety of important programs in every state and territory, including multi-jurisdictional drug enforcement, treatment interventions, police training, technology improvements, crime prevention programs, and crime victims’ assistance programs. Byrne/JAG is currently the only source of funding available for multi-jurisdictional drug enforcement, including methamphetamine initiatives, and is critical for drug courts, law enforcement information sharing, gang prevention, and prisoner reentry programs.
A 67% cut in the Byrne/JAG funding will force state law enforcement agencies to shut down multi-jurisdictional drug and gang task forces, lay off police and prosecutors, and cease to fund programs proven to assist drug-addicted citizens to again become productive members of society. With the economic downturn and a possible increase in crime due to a weakened economy, the cuts could not have come at a worse time. Additionally, significant budget problems still face state and/or territorial legislatures while there is an increase in heroin, prescription narcotic, and methamphetamine abuse in the states and territories.

Without law enforcement, drug addicts rarely seek treatment. The National Institute of Drug Abuse (NIDA) estimated that in 1995 untreated drug and alcohol addiction cost the nation $276 billion in hidden expenses such as lost productivity and crime. The human cost is even higher and cannot be calculated. The Byrne/JAG cuts have the potential to further weaken the nation when it is already immersed in a housing crisis and an economic downturn.

We ask that you restore Byrne/JAG funding in FY 2008 so that we can continue to protect the citizens of our states, territories and of this nation against drug abuse, crime and violence.

Sincerely,

John Suthers
Attorney General of Colorado

Jim Hood
Attorney General of Mississippi

Marc E. Dann
Attorney General of Ohio

Talis J. Colberg
Attorney General of Alaska

Terry Goddard
Attorney General of Arizona

G. Steven Rowe
Attorney General of Maine

Jon Bruning
Attorney General of Nebraska

Troy King
Attorney General of Alabama

/s/ Fepulea'i A. "Afa" Ripley Jr.
Attorney General of American Samoa

Dustin McDaniel
Attorney General of Arkansas
Edmund G. Brown, Jr.        Richard Blumenthal
Attorney General of California  Attorney General of Connecticut

Joseph R. Biden, III  Peter Nickles
Attorney General of Delaware  Interim Attorney General of D.C.

Bill McCollum        Thurbert E. Baker
Attorney General of Florida  Attorney General of Georgia

Alicia G. Limtiaco  Mark J. Bennett
Attorney General of Guam  Attorney General of Hawaii

Lawrence Wasden  Lisa Madigan
Attorney General of Idaho  Attorney General of Illinois

Stephen Carter  Tom Miller
Attorney General of Indiana  Attorney General of Iowa

Stephen Six  Jack Conway
Attorney General of Kansas  Attorney General of Kentucky

James D. “Buddy” Caldwell  Douglas Gansler
Attorney General of Louisiana  Attorney General of Maryland

Martha Coakley  Michael Cox
Attorney General of Massachusetts  Attorney General of Michigan
Lori Swanson  
Attorney General of Minnesota

Mike McGrath  
Attorney General of Montana

Kelly Ayotte  
Attorney General of New Hampshire

Gary King  
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Matthew T. Gregory  
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Roberto J. Sanchez-Ramos  
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Henry McMaster  
Attorney General of South Carolina

Jeremiah W. Nixon  
Attorney General of Missouri

Catherine Cortez Masto  
Attorney General of Nevada

Anne Milgram  
Attorney General of New Jersey

Andrew Cuomo  
Attorney General of New York

Wayne Stenehjem  
Attorney General of North Dakota

W.A. Drew Edmondson  
Attorney General of Oklahoma

Tom Corbett  
Attorney General of Pennsylvania

Patrick C. Lynch  
Attorney General of Rhode Island

Larry Long  
Attorney General of South Dakota
Cc: The Honorable David Obey, Chairman, House Committee on Appropriations;
The Honorable Jerry Lewis, Ranking Member, House Committee on Appropriations;
The Honorable Alan Mollohan, Chairman of the Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies;
The Honorable Rodney P. Frelinghuysen, Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies;
The Honorable Robert C. Byrd, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Appropriations;
The Honorable Thad Cochran, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Appropriations;
The Honorable Barbara A. Mikulski, Chairman, Senate Committee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies;
The Honorable Richard C. Shelby, Ranking Member, Senate Committee on Commerce, Justice, Science, and Related Agencies