



Department of Justice

STATEMENT OF THE
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE

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BEFORE THE
SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIME, TERRORISM, AND HOMELAND SECURITY
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
UNITED STATES HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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AT A
HEARING ENTITLED
“BEYOND THE STREETS: AMERICA'S EVOLVING GANG THREAT”

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JULY 25, 2012

**Statement of the
United States Department of Justice
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Chairman Sensenbrenner, Ranking Member Scott, and Members of the Subcommittee – Thank you for permitting us to submit this statement for today’s hearing. We welcome the opportunity to discuss the Department of Justice’s efforts to combat the dangers posed by gangs and gang violence.

Gangs represent a serious and growing threat to our nation. There are approximately 33,000 gangs in the United States, with an estimated 1.4 million members – an increase of over 40% from 2009. Far too many of our streets and communities are terrorized by gangs, and far too many of our citizens live in fear. In many neighborhoods, because of gang violence, parents and grandparents do not feel safe sitting on their porches; children do not feel safe walking to and from school, or even while at school. To counter the violence and the threat, the Department of Justice has taken a multifaceted approach, balancing strong enforcement to take violent gang members off our streets with prevention programs designed to stop young people from entering gangs in the first place.

One of the principal challenges in gang enforcement is that most violent street gangs are singular entities and not part of a centralized national or transnational organization. Unlike in our successful efforts against the mafia and traditional organized crime, when it comes to gangs, there are not simply “five families” – there are 33,000. While a number of gangs – such as the Bloods, Crips, Latin Kings, Aryan Brotherhood, and MS-13 – are national or transnational in scope and structure, many more are neighborhood-based street crews. So we have to fight gangs city by city, neighborhood by neighborhood, block by block. To do so, we rely on the expertise of our State, local, and tribal law enforcement partners, the U.S. Attorneys’ Offices on the ground in every State, and the Criminal Division’s Organized Crime and Gang Section at the national level.

At the Federal level, each U.S. Attorney’s Office has a dedicated Anti-Gang Coordinator, who is responsible for developing an anti-gang strategy tailored to the problem in each Federal judicial district. Each U.S. Attorney also leads a Project Safe Neighborhoods task force, which combines Federal, State and local law enforcement and community partners in a comprehensive strategy to reduce violent crime, including gang crime, through enforcement, intervention, and prevention.

The Criminal Division’s Organized Crime and Gang Section (OCGS) focuses on gangs of regional, national, and international significance. It partners with local U.S. Attorneys’

Offices to prosecute these gangs in every corner of the country. OCGS was formed in 2010 from the merger of the Organized Crime and Racketeering Section and the Gang Unit. That merger, which was approved by the Attorney General with the concurrence of Congress, has enabled the Department to use its resources more efficiently and effectively to pursue the most significant regional, national, and transnational gang threats. OCGS also maintains an information-sharing network that allows prosecutors in OCGS and the U.S. Attorneys' Offices to share their expertise and help each other overcome investigative and prosecutive challenges.

The Department also has task forces in more than 370 locations focused on combating violent crime, including FBI Violent Gang Safe Streets Task Forces, Violent Crime Safe Streets Task Forces, and Safe Trails Task Forces; ATF regional task forces and Violent Crime Impact Teams; Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) regional task forces and High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) task forces; and United States Marshals Service (USMS) Regional Fugitive and District Fugitive Task Forces. These Federal task forces work with State, local, and tribal law enforcement partners to reduce gang violence in their communities, arresting tens of thousands of gang members and disrupting thousands of gang crimes. The Department is in the process of reviewing these task forces to ensure that our agent resources are utilized and managed most efficiently, and if there are areas of duplication or overlap, we will eliminate or consolidate task forces to achieve a more streamlined approach.

In order to help ensure that our enforcement efforts are coordinated, our prosecutors and agents rely on the expertise and resources of the National Gang Targeting, Enforcement, and Coordination Center (GangTECC). GangTECC provides deconfliction and coordination services for gang cases being investigated across the country, helping to ensure that agents and prosecutors are best positioned to share leads and evidence across jurisdictional and agency lines whenever possible.

GangTECC has been transformed over the past two years, and those changes are an example of smart law enforcement and good government; they also exemplify the Department's efforts to use its precious enforcement resources as efficiently and effectively as possible. GangTECC was created in 2006 as a stand-alone entity charged with facilitating and coordinating multi-agency and multi-jurisdictional gang investigations. But during its first three years of existence, GangTECC supported only approximately 100 cases and coordinated only 12. In order to make GangTECC more effective, in July 2010 – with the support of the Attorney General and under the leadership of Assistant Attorney General Lanny Breuer – the Department merged GangTECC into the Special Operations Division (SOD), a multi-agency center with a long track-record of successfully coordinating multi-agency and multi-jurisdictional narcotics, money-laundering, and related cases. By any measure, that merger, which was completed in the fall of 2010, has been a great success. Indeed, after supporting only approximately 100 cases in three years, GangTECC supported *over 750 cases* in its first full year at SOD alone, and is on pace to exceed that this year. The expansion in the use of GangTECC helps promote intelligence-driven investigations and helps ensure that our efforts to dismantle gangs are more coordinated, efficient, and effective.

Because gangs pose a threat to communities of all sizes and types – whether urban, suburban, or rural – we place a high priority on providing support to State, local, and tribal law enforcement officers, both by partnering on cases as part of task forces and by providing intelligence and other information to assist in their investigations. To that end, the National Gang Intelligence Center (NGIC) supports law enforcement agencies through timely and accurate information-sharing and analysis of Federal, State, and local law enforcement information focusing on gangs that pose a significant threat to communities throughout the United States. NGIC also prepares the National Gang Threat Assessment, issued every two years to agencies throughout the United States.

Last April, NGIC introduced “NGIC Online,” a web-based system that allows gang investigators throughout the country, at all levels of law enforcement, to access the latest intelligence on gangs and to request information and analytical support quickly and easily. Through NGIC Online, law enforcement officers across the United States have access to a wealth of gang intelligence products and images, officer safety alerts, and a signs, symbols, and tattoos database. NGIC is accessed by users approximately 20,000 times per month, and the number of new users is increasing at a rate of 6 percent per month. Through this system, the Department is able to share intelligence with State, local, and tribal officers more efficiently and effectively, so those officers can use the information to enhance investigations and promote officer safety.

Our enforcement efforts have made communities safer throughout the Nation, from Charlotte to San Francisco, Los Angeles to Nashville, and Houston to Chicago. The following are just a few examples of the many successful gang cases brought by agents and prosecutors across the country:

- In Nashville, following an investigation led by ATF and local police, the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Middle District of Tennessee and OCGS charged 37 leaders and members of the Bloods with racketeering, multiple murders, and other acts of violence. Of the 37 defendants, 35 pleaded guilty, and two were convicted at trial. Those same offices also prosecuted 11 members and associates of the national street gang known as the Traveling Vice Lords, which was founded in Chicago and has spread throughout the United States. The defendants were charged with, among other things, participation in two murders and five attempted murders involving 15 victims. Among those killed was an elderly gentleman at home with his wife and two developmentally-disabled grandchildren, whose house was mistakenly targeted. Eight of the defendants pleaded guilty, and the remaining three were convicted at trial and received life sentences.
- In Newburgh, New York, the U.S. Attorney’s Office for the Southern District of New York and the FBI have led a crackdown on multiple sets of the Bloods gang operating in that city, including charges in September 2011 against 20 members and associates of the gang for, among other things, crimes of violence, firearms offenses, and narcotics trafficking.

- In Ft. Wayne, Indiana, following an investigation led by the FBI Fort Wayne Violent Gang Safe Streets Task Force, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Indiana charged 40 leaders and members of a neighborhood-based gang called the "Authentic Mexican Gangsters," along with members of a Mexican drug trafficking organization, with conspiracy to distribute narcotics and weapons offenses. The investigation led to the seizure of 26 guns from gang members and their associates. Information developed during the investigation was used to help prevent a murder being planned by gang members.
- In Los Angeles, the U.S. Attorney's Office and DEA have led a multi-jurisdictional, multi-agency effort to target the hierarchy of the Mexican Mafia and the Sureno street gangs it controls. To date, that operation, supported by GangTECC, has resulted in nearly 500 arrests and the seizure of over \$1.7 million in cash and large quantities of cocaine and methamphetamine.
- Over the past several years, OCGS has partnered with the U.S. Attorney's Offices in Charlotte, Maryland, Washington, DC, Nashville, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, among other jurisdictions, to prosecute the violent transnational gang known as MS-13. Collectively, those cases have led to charges against more than 160 members of the gang for racketeering, murders, assaults, and other offenses – including charges against several MS-13 leaders in El Salvador who ordered murders to be committed here in the United States. Several of these cases were assisted by the efforts of the MS-13 National Gang Task Force, an inter-agency entity that leverages the expertise and resources of local, State, Federal, and international law enforcement agencies involved in investigating MS-13. The NGTF has also established the Transnational Anti-Gang (TAG) Initiative, which partners the FBI with the national police of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Honduras to investigate and disrupt gangs in these countries that pose the greatest threat to the United States and Central America.
- The FBI-led Somali Gang Initiative is designed to ascertain the rising impact of Sudanese and Somali gangs operating in the United States, including both radicalized and non-radicalized membership. Through this initiative, the NGIC will coordinate with the FBI's Safe Streets and Gang Unit to share and disseminate intelligence relating to Somali gangs to mitigate both criminal and national security threats. As one example of our efforts to pursue Somali gangs, in an investigation that reached from Minnesota to Tennessee, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Middle District of Tennessee, the FBI, and local police successfully pursued a gang known as the "Somali Outlawz," which was engaged in sex trafficking violations, including the exploitation of underage prostitutes who were primarily of Somali origins.
- Operation Save Our Streets (SOS) is an FBI initiative that was initiated in 2010. SOS utilizes a focused investigative strategy to address unusually high increases in homicides and gang violence in targeted areas. The SOS Initiative was utilized in

Los Angeles, and focused on unsolved gang related homicides. The FBI in Los Angeles and the Los Angeles Police Department worked together, partnering agents and detectives to solve these homicides. The Los Angeles SOS partnership resulted in solving 107 homicide cases, the felony arrest of over 180 subjects, and the recovery of 40 guns during the operation. Operation SOS also resulted in a 22% reduction in gang related homicides and a 20% reduction in violence in targeted neighborhoods.

- SOS has also been utilized by the FBI in Milwaukee, in conjunction with the Milwaukee Police Department, to focus on gang related non-fatal shootings and assaults. The Milwaukee SOS resulted in the arrest of 135 subjects for 384 felony violations, and led to the seizure of 31 firearms.
- The USMS launched a gang enforcement program known as Operation Triple Beam (OTB) in August 2010. OTB targets violent offenders through USMS fugitive task forces using a three-pronged approach: fugitive apprehension led by USMS; illegal firearms and narcotics investigations led by Federal, State, and local partner agencies; and pro-active street patrol led by the lead local partner agency. The operational goal is to target those gang members and others identified as repeat offenders. Anti-gang operations have been conducted throughout the country, including in San Antonio, Texas, Tulsa, Oklahoma, the Mississippi Delta, Omaha, Nebraska, and Kinston, North Carolina. To date, OTB has resulted in approximately 1,400 arrests of gang members and the seizure of narcotics valued at over \$1.6 million, over 300 firearms, and approximately \$380,000 in cash. Overall, the USMS has arrested over 4,000 gang members in FY 2012 to date.

We have also aggressively pursued other gangs that operate from behind prison walls. For instance, OCGS and the U.S. Attorney's Offices in the Western, Southern, and Eastern Districts of Texas, working with a task force comprised of Federal, State, and local law enforcement agencies, have investigated and prosecuted numerous leaders and members of the Aryan Brotherhood of Texas, a powerful race-based organization operating inside and outside State and Federal prisons throughout the State of Texas and elsewhere in the United States. To date, the task force has charged over 20 members and leaders of this highly organized and violent gang, all of whom have pleaded guilty or been convicted at trial, and several of whom have been sentenced to life in Federal prison.

The FBI has instituted the California Gang Intelligence Initiative (CGII), which is designed to combat prison-based gangs and assess their influence on and control over street-gang activity. CGII is a joint intelligence collection and analysis initiative among the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, the FBI's Safe Streets and Gang Unit, and NGIC. CGII is designed to identify the most serious prison gang threats to the institution and the community; assess the gang's potential for violence and multi-jurisdictional impact; and disseminate available intelligence to law enforcement and correctional personnel as it becomes available. Although it is primarily focused on prison-based gangs, CGII leverages prison

intelligence to support, enhance, and/or initiate investigations outside of the prison system. Further, CGII detects, deters, and disrupts efforts by the gangs' leadership and facilitators to extend their reach from within prisons to communities in California and beyond.

We have also made it a priority to pursue gangs operating in Indian country. For example, OCGS and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the District of Arizona have worked with a Federal-State-local-tribal task force headed by ATF and the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Community Police Department to target the East Side Los Guada Bloods gang, which has terrorized the Salt River Pima-Maricopa Indian Reservation, outside of Phoenix. To date, seven defendants have been charged with racketeering and other offenses, including a series of six drive-by shootings of residences believed to be occupied by rival gang members over the span of five hours. In one of the incidents, gang members shot at police officers who were responding to a 911 call from one of the gang's prior drive-bys earlier in the evening.

In the last fiscal year, the FBI received 40 new positions, including 24 agent positions, to support priority criminal investigations within Indian country. These resources will be focused on criminal enterprise investigations in drugs, gangs, public corruption, and gaming industry integrity issues in Indian Country.

Finally, the Department is confronting the threat posed by gangs operating along the Southwest border, often in concert with Mexican drug trafficking organizations. As an example, in March 2011, a third superseding indictment was unsealed charging 35 members and associates of the Barrio Azteca, a violent prison-based gang associated with the Juarez Cartel that was responsible for the March 13, 2010 murders in Juarez, Mexico, of U.S. Consulate employee Leslie Ann Enriquez Catton, her husband Arthur Redelfs and Jorge Alberto Salcido Cenicerros, the husband of a U.S. Consulate employee. The defendants, from both the United States and Mexico, were charged with racketeering, narcotics distribution and importation, retaliation against witnesses, extortion, money laundering, obstruction of justice, and murder. Of the 35 defendants charged, 33 have been apprehended. To date, 24 of those defendants have pleaded guilty, and one defendant committed suicide while imprisoned during his trial. This case was made possible due to the tireless efforts of the Criminal Division, the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Western District of Texas, the FBI, and the DEA, with strong support from the USMS and cooperation from Mexican authorities.

Our enforcement efforts can have a dramatic impact on the safety and quality of life in our communities. But even the most successful enforcement program is not enough – we simply cannot arrest our way out of the epidemic of gang membership and gang violence. Rather, we must address the social factors that cause our young people to be drawn into gangs in the first place. We must try to rescue those who want out. And we must help prevent others from ever getting in.

To that end, the Department's Office of Justice Programs (OJP) supports a number of grant programs to prevent gangs and gang violence, including a variety of youth violence and gun crime prevention initiatives. These kinds of programs work, and they must continue to be

supported. For instance, in the first quarter of FY 2012, OJP reported that 65 percent of youths participating in Department-funded violence prevention programs exhibited a positive change in targeted behaviors as a result of participation in those programs. The Department's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) has also developed a variety of tools and publications to help identify and address gang crime, including *Strategies to Address Gang Crime: A Guidebook for Local Law Enforcement*. Partnerships among law enforcement, schools, parents, youth, community and faith-based groups, and other government agencies are critical to reducing the influence of gangs in communities across the United States. Intervention and prevention programs are a sound investment, as the money we spend on intervention and prevention today is money we do not have to spend on enforcement tomorrow.

Combating and reducing gang violence is, and will continue to be, a priority for the Department and the Administration. And as we pursue this vital mission, we are committed to making the most efficient and effective use of our resources. We very much appreciate the opportunity to discuss with you the challenges we face in the fight against gangs. We look forward to continuing to work with Congress to enhance our efforts.