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GOVERNOR CORZINE UNVEILS STRATEGY FOR SAFE STREETS AND NEIGHBORHOODS

Three Part Strategy to Focus on Enforcement, Prevention and Re-entry

TRENTON - Governor Jon S. Corzine today introduced the first piece of a comprehensive three part strategy to enhance public safety and combat violent street crime in the Garden State. The strategy addresses issues of enforcement, prevention and re-entry with an emphasis on reducing gang violence, violent crime and recidivism.

The strategy itself follows several fundamental principles. First, every component will use data and analysis to both identify problems and eliminate them. Second, the state will serve in a support role to help identify problems and assist communities in applying appropriate solutions. Third, involved parties must communicate fully with one another in the development, delivery and assessment of strategies and programs. Finally, all programs will be critically evaluated through data driven analysis and adjusted appropriately to ensure maximum effectiveness. The enforcement aspect of the plan, introduced today, will target and prosecute those who engage in gang violence and carry illegal weapons.

“Today we stand together as citizens of New Jersey to fight back against the gangs and violence that threaten to dominate our streets and neighborhoods.” Governor Jon S. Corzine said. “This is the first stage of a larger plan that addresses all aspects of crime by taking a comprehensive approach that includes strict law enforcement, prevention programs to help at risk youth, job training and re-entry programs to reduce recidivism among those leaving prison.”

Today, violent crime represents one of the state’s most significant public safety problems. Although overall arrests and reported crimes decreased from 2000 to 2005, statewide arrests for murder and weapons increased among both adults and juveniles. Data analysis has found that the majority of this crime occurs in 20 specific municipalities. The increase of violent crime in these communities is tied to an increase in gang presence. By effectively targeting violent gangs in these 20 municipalities, law enforcement can make a significant impact on overall violent crime in New Jersey. Staying true to the principles of the strategy, the enforcement aspect requires high levels of coordination and collaboration between state and local organizations.

“This is a plan to attack violent crime, street gangs and gun violence in the most coordinated manner possible,” Attorney General Milgram said. “The state's role is to be both a leader and a facilitator of programs that work on both state and local levels, and to continually assess and analyze initiatives in our fight against violent crime. Our enforcement policy will be built on new policing strategies, stopping the use and possession of illegal guns, and combating witness intimidation.”

The state will encourage and assist law enforcement agencies to move towards intelligence-led, data-driven policing strategies. Local departments will be required to submit crime data to the state. This information will be used to map overall crime trends, identify violent offenders and target “hot spots”. Through the use of data analysis, increased use of technology including video surveillance and improved dispatch methods, local departments can move towards a model of crime prevention rather than crime response.

“The Crime Plan follows a strategy that is rooted in intelligence-led policing, which has become the cornerstone for all modern police initiatives,” said Colonel Rick Fuentes, Superintendent of the New Jersey State Police. “Reactive policing is like shining a flashlight in a dark room, intelligence-led policing turns on the overhead lights allowing law enforcement to see the big picture and deploy assets where they will have the greatest effect.”

In addition, local law enforcement agencies must work together to gather and share intelligence on local gang problems so they may more effectively target these violent gangs. An appointed Statewide Gang Coordinator reporting to the Attorney General will collaborate with law enforcement agencies in the implementation of these functions.

If gang violence is to be ebbed, the flow of illegal guns into the state must be stopped. Through coordination with the Bureau of Alcohol Tobacco and Firearm’s national e-trace database, the state will be able to more effectively trace the sources of illegal firearms. Even with better tracking, the use of guns can be decreased if shootings are investigated vigorously and quickly. Shooting response teams, already currently active in parts of the state, have had a significant impact on local gun violence. These multi-agency teams investigate each shooting with the same intensity and resources of a homicide investigation. The use and deployment of shooting response teams will be determined by the Attorney General and the County Prosecutor, based on their local gang assessment, shooting prevalence and distribution. To further prevent shootings police will also target for prosecution individuals who illegally carry firearms and commit or threaten violence on others. Those targets will then be tracked and law enforcement officers will use all investigative tools and techniques necessary to arrest, detain and convict individuals prior to the occurrence of a shooting.

If enforcement efforts are to be successful, we must remember that they do not begin and end with law enforcement agencies. Members of the community must be part of the solution. Enforcement agencies will work with the community and community outreach groups to identify priorities and targets and also help prevent retaliatory violence after a shooting.

Too often intimidation and the fear of further violence prevent witnesses from coming forward after a crime. The state must be able to provide protection for these witnesses if they are expected to testify. The Attorney General will ask law enforcement professionals to assess current protection programs and develop a new model protection program. Furthermore, the Department of Community Affairs has agreed to provide housing vouchers, redeemable around the country, for witnesses and victims to violent crime. Finally, by increasing the use of law enforcement officers as witnesses, the challenges of witness intimidation can be eliminated from prosecution.

In addition to law enforcement, the Legislature is an important partner in the fight against violent crime. The Governor and the Attorney General will work with the Legislature to propose or support legislation that gives law enforcement more effective tools to combat gang activities, recruiting, gun violence and witness intimidation.

While the above enforcement aspects of the Governor's strategy will help to ebb violence in the state, the tactics will be increasingly effective when implemented along side the initiatives outlined in the prevention and re-entry aspects of the plan. Governor Corzine will unveil the prevention and re-entry initiatives over the next two days.

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