

# DISTRICT ATTORNEYS ASSOCIATION OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK



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SARATOGA COUNTY

Thursday, January 24, 2008

## **Criminal Justice Initiatives Receive Bipartisan Support** *District Attorneys applaud Governor's proposals for IMPACT, witness protection*

Gov. Eliot Spitzer's proposals to fund Operation IMPACT at its highest level ever and create a statewide witness protection program are receiving bipartisan support from district attorneys across the state.

Earlier this week, the governor unveiled his 2008-09 budget proposal, which included two key criminal justice initiatives:

- \$17.5 million for Operation IMPACT, the state's program to strategically tackle violent and gun crime through intelligence-based policing, partnership among law enforcement agencies and timely use of accurate crime data. The initiative targets the 17 counties Upstate and on Long Island that report more than 80 percent of the crime outside of New York City.
- \$500,000 for the creation of a statewide Witness Protection Program, which would assist district attorneys in protecting key witnesses to crimes so that they may safely testify.

"We are very pleased that the Governor continues to support Operation IMPACT, which has been the single most effective program to reducing violent crime," said Saratoga County District Attorney James A. Murphy III, who also serves as president of the New York State District Attorneys' Association. "By targeting the 17 counties that need the money the most, neighboring counties also benefit because criminals don't abide by jurisdictional boundaries."

"By attacking crime in neighboring communities, the program also drives down the crime rate regionally," Murphy said. "We all benefit from this important investment."

According to the state Division of Criminal Justice Services (DCJS), crime in the 17 jurisdictions in New York State that participate in Operation IMPACT was down 5.4 percent for the first 11 months of 2007, led by double-digit decreases in murder, robberies and motor vehicle thefts. IMPACT targets Albany, Broome, Chautauqua, Dutchess, Erie, Monroe, Nassau, Niagara, Oneida, Onondaga, Orange, Rensselaer, Rockland, Schenectady, Suffolk, Ulster and Westchester counties.

And for the first six months of 2007 – the most recent timeframe for which statewide statistics are available – crime in New York State was down 5 percent, according to DCJS.

MUNICIPAL CENTER, 25 WEST HIGH STREET  
BALLSTON SPA, NY 12020  
TEL. (518) 885-2263 FAX (518) 884-8627

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“Operation IMPACT is to law enforcement what Eli Manning is to the New York Giants. It is the execution of a brilliant strategy, a consistent game plan and success in spite of difficult odds,” Onondaga County District Attorney William J. Fitzpatrick said. “This is no time to become victims of our own success. I commend the governor for recognizing the importance of this program, and for continuing to fund it adequately throughout New York State.”

Added Schenectady County District Attorney Robert M. Carney: “People living in upstate cities like Schenectady would love to see crime go down the way it has in New York City. Now, through IMPACT, the state is propelling us in that direction by funding police and prosecution initiatives shaped by real-time crime analysis and aided by the latest technologies, including public surveillance cameras and license plate readers.”

“Without state resources, we couldn’t do what we’re doing, and the results, to date, speak for themselves. For the first 11 months of last year, violent crime is down nearly 15 percent in the city of Schenectady,” District Attorney Carney added.

In Westchester County, violent crime declined by more than 11 percent in 2007, which means that 232 fewer people in that county fell victim to violent crime, according to District Attorney Janet Di Fiore.

“Operation IMPACT brings together all the key players – including federal, state and local law enforcement authorities, parole, probation, and the State Liquor Authority – to mount an intelligence-driven and successful anti-crime strategy,” she said.

Added Erie County District Attorney Frank J. Clark: “Albany is listening to us and giving us the resources to do what we need and do it well. They’ve already given us a structure to work with. They’ve already brought us all together as a team. But just like the finest car in the world needs gas to go, they are also giving us the gas.”

DCJS also has expanded the key principles of Operation IMPACT – intelligence-based policing, partnerships among law enforcement agencies and timely use of accurate crime data among them – to law enforcement agencies in suburban and rural counties through its IMPACT Tools grant program.

IMPACT Tools grants are competitive and designed to help non-IMPACT agencies identify trends and develop and implement effective strategies to tackle violent and drug crimes. The agencies can use the money in a variety of ways, including to purchase equipment, such as laptop computers and portable radios, and to pay for overtime or personnel.

Last year, the state provided 28 law enforcement agencies with more than \$800,000 through this program. District Attorney Murphy’s office, for example, recently received \$49,216 to fund a part-time prosecutor to handle drug and violent crimes in Saratoga Springs.

The creation of a Witness Protection Program is key because many, if not all, Upstate counties have little or no money to protect those who are in danger because of their decision to cooperate with authorities, District Attorney Murphy said.

“Without witnesses, we simply cannot function,” he said. “We’ve been asking for this funding for a long time, and we’re pleased that the governor has responded to our request and taken witness protection seriously.”

Added Bronx District Attorney Robert T. Johnson, one of the longest-tenured district attorneys in the state: “Witness intimidation is all too real and prevalent. Anything that we can do to enhance the safety of those who witness crimes will encourage them to come forward, which ultimately protects us all. We are pleased that the Governor understands the importance of providing this additional resource for the criminal justice system.”

The governor’s plan to set aside funds for witness protection also would complement Rochester’s “You Bet I Told” initiative. Spearheaded by church leaders in partnership with Monroe County District Attorney Michael C. Green, Rochester Mayor Robert Duffy and the county’s law enforcement council and supported with funding from local businesses and DCJS, the campaign encourages those who witness crimes to break the silence of the street and cooperate with law enforcement. Billboards promoting the initiative went up throughout the city earlier this month.

“Governor Spitzer’s initiative regarding witness protection will help address a pressing local need. We appreciate the pledge of additional money for witness protection, legislation to protect victims, and the Governor’s willingness to partner with us on efforts to involve the community in our violence reduction strategies,” District Attorney Green said.

“In addition to enforcement efforts like IMPACT, the Governor's focus on affordable and accessible primary and secondary education, and meaningful economic development for upstate communities must be part of our long-term public safety plan,” he added. “We must provide our youth with a solid education and meaningful employment opportunities as an alternative to gangs and crime. Governor Spitzer has effectively addressed both short- and long-term public safety issues with his proposals.”