



**Opening Remarks by
C. Ray Nagin
Mayor, City of New Orleans**

NEW ORLEANS, LA (April 10, 2007) -- Mayor C. Ray Nagin gave opening remarks today before the start of the House Judiciary Committee Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security regarding the "Katrina Impact on Crime and the Criminal Justice System in New Orleans."

The text of his comments follows:

I am C. Ray Nagin, Mayor of New Orleans, one of America's most beloved and culturally distinctive cities, and a city which is facing the challenge of recovering and rebuilding after the worst natural and man-made disaster to occur in the United States of America.

To Chairman Robert C. "Bobby" Scott and members of this Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism and Homeland Security of the House Committee on the Judiciary: Thank you for coming to New Orleans to continue the generous support Congress has given for the rebuilding of our city.

I would also like to publicly express appreciation for the dedicated and tireless support that we have received from the United States Department of Justice. By supplying federal assets and resources to assist our police department, speed the repair of our criminal justice system and initiate innovative programs, they have been an invaluable partner.

You will hear testimony today regarding the struggles that we face in rebuilding a criminal justice system whose infrastructure was completely destroyed by Hurricane Katrina and the subsequent flooding. Our work has been unflagging, and I would like to outline for you the steps that we have taken to accelerate its recovery:

Last summer, I convened a 100-day implementation team to provide recommendations for accelerating several areas of our recovery, including city services, repopulation, and the criminal justice system. The 100-day team was led by Former Louisiana Attorney General Richard Ieyoub and included many individuals who will testify today. Some of the accomplishments of this team were:

- * Established automated intranet access to give the District Attorney and Clerk of Criminal District Courts immediate access to accurate records of police personnel.
- * Improved subpoena delivery to police officers on the orders of Police Superintendent Warren Riley to have the NOPD Office of Compliance be responsible for the acceptance of all Criminal District Court subpoenas and for delivery to members of the department.
- * Collaborated with District Attorney's Office to secure additional Assistant DAs from other jurisdictions to eliminate the excessive case backlog.
- * Reorganized physical evidence damaged during Hurricane Katrina and made it available for trial in June 2006.

Earlier this year, key members of the criminal justice system and the New Orleans City Council stood with me to announce a focused effort on violent crime in our city. Since January, with the cooperation of Orleans Parish Criminal Sheriff Marlin Gusman and the support of his deputies, our police department has been able to assign more police officers to police patrols. In addition, the department, under the leadership of Chief Riley, has increased the number of drug and alcohol checkpoint areas in the city, leading to hundreds of arrests, drug seizures and the confiscation of hundreds of guns. The department also has implemented the Quality of Life task force that is addressing concerns less immediate than life and death situations, but that contribute to the way that people feel about our neighborhoods.

We are grateful for the hardworking men and women in law enforcement who, in the midst of their own personal losses, continue to serve on the front line to protect our citizens and our city. Last fall, I proposed and the City Council approved pay increases for police officers. We are currently working with Civil Service to develop a program that would provide incentives to attract former military personnel to become police officers in our department.

Despite this positive movement, we continue to face many challenges. Our police department remains understaffed and lacks some critical equipment and supplies. Our officers are encountering more crime suspects and victims who suffer from substance abuse. And too many of our young people are on the road to prison or an early death.

In crafting our federal legislative agenda this year, we focused on these realities and the fact that the

criminal justice system does not exist in isolation. It is struggling to provide safety and security in a city with many problems that can lead to crime and violence, some of which existed before Hurricane Katrina's widespread destruction exacerbated their affect:

- * Like many communities in this country, we face a substance abuse crisis
- * The education system, which was deeply troubled before Katrina, is rebuilding from scratch
- * Domestic violence is a significant problem that triggers cycles of violence in homes
- * Our mental health services delivery system is broken and putting even more strain on the police department

We are seeking the following appropriations to address some of these issues:

Crime Fighting Tools

- * \$17.1 million for vehicles, equipment and a recruiting strategy to support the crime fighting efforts of the New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) by giving them critical tools to increase their capacity and effectiveness.

Summer Jobs Initiative to Prevent Juvenile Crime

- * \$4 million to employ 2,000 young people from our most at-risk age categories in a summer jobs program that would provide healthy and constructive alternatives in their lives.

Re-establish an Ex-Offender Workforce Development Program to Prevent Recidivism

- * \$3 million to fund comprehensive workforce development services for 500 former offenders so they can re-establish themselves productively in our community

Provide Critical Drug Rehabilitation Services

- * \$10 million over 3 years to implement a program that would provide culturally sensitive and appropriate drug rehabilitation and prevention, and would increase facility capacity. We have to combat the scourge of drugs shattering lives and destroying the fabric of our community.

Public safety has been a critical concern of our administration. We have made aggressive efforts to focus on violent crime and have specifically targeted murders. In increasing the presence of police officers on the street and through cooperation with the U.S. Attorney's Office, U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Orleans Parish Criminal Sheriff's Office, the District Attorney, judges and the community, we are confident that we have all aspects of criminal justice system working in concert. We will not give up until we make our community safe.

Thank you again for visiting New Orleans. We look forward to your continued support as rebuild from an experience no other American city has ever faced.