

Request: Expand law enforcement grants specifically to provide dollars and programs for smaller, rural communities in recognition of their special challenges and needs.

Description: The City of Gustine is home for 5,900 residents, located on the western side of Merced County. Without major shopping centers or tourism as a base, the City continues to have a small general fund. The City spends more than three-quarters of its annual General Fund budget on its Police Department yet still struggles in providing an adequate police presence due to a number of factors.



Many weekends and evenings, the City has one officer patrolling the entire community. While it has mutual aid agreements with a neighboring small City in the next County, there remains a lack of backup and a means for opportunistic crime related to priority demands for the officer on duty at any given time.

In addition to the basic issue of having enough personnel hours to fund the officers, the City faces challenges in staffing due to attrition. The City has aggressively recruited officers and has put into place longevity bonus for officers to try to retain them. However, the City cannot come close to the wages and bonus offers that larger, more affluent cities can offer. In recent decades, the City has hired steady flow of officers who join our force, receive full training by the City and then move on to higher-paying departments elsewhere. They also know that in these positions there are normally backup officers.

In years past, federal funding has provided some assistance in helping the City to fund additional positions that it otherwise could not fund. However, programs specifically aimed at greater levels of assistance for the smallest cities, those less than 10,000 residents, would give cities like Gustine a more even playing field in retaining officers and provide an increased level of officer coverage on a regular basis.

Necessity: Having a single patrol unit on at any one time remains a challenge regardless of the size of the City or law enforcement agency. Officers are truly alone and criminals are aware that an opportunity to commit crimes exist if they capitalize on a busy officer or create a diversion elsewhere.

Many cities have been able to add officers during expansion of their cities. The City of Gustine has not added a new housing development in approximately 20 years due to its agricultural nature and rural location. While crime has grown in our society, law enforcement dollars in small, regional areas have not significantly increased.

Creative solutions and special grants, aimed at assisting small, rural cities would make a very real impact in the safety and security of citizens in communities such as Gustine.

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