INSPIRED LEADERS
SHAPING CITIES

MAKING DOWNTOWNS SAFE FOR EVERYONE

ISSUE BRIEF

IDA POSITION

Congress can improve public safety in America's downtowns and city centers by maintaining recent funding increases for the Byrne JAG program in FY2027.

BACKGROUND

Increased crime – and the public's perception of reduced safety – has impacted the ability of America's downtowns to recover from the pandemic, as people are less likely to visit city centers and office workers are deterred from returning to in-person work. When downtowns lose vitality, entire regions suffer.

There are a number of causes for the increase in crime, including:

- *Reduced police presence.* The ratio of full-time sworn officers per 1,000 people fell by over 10 percent between 1997 and 2016, according to the Bureau of Justice Statistics. A Police Executive Research Forum survey reported that police departments on average had 1.5% fewer full-time officers in 2021 than a year before.
- *An increase in smash and grabs.* Recent years have seen a rise in the number of high-profile "smash-and-grab" attacks, where organized groups of people engage in fast, coordinated robberies of retail stores. In a 2021 online survey by the National Retail Federation, 69% of retailers reported an increase in organized retail theft over the previous year, citing among the causes the pandemic, changes to sentencing guidelines and the growth of online marketplaces.

The federal government has a critical role to play in improving public safety as a partner with states and localities through the Byrne Justice Assistance Grant (Byrne JAG) program.

Byrne JAG's formula funding reaches every state and a diverse cross-section of communities, from large urban areas to rural counties. It enables grantees to address their unique needs and help fill gaps in every aspect of the criminal justice system, from violence prevention and incarceration alternatives, to mental health and substance abuse treatment and services. An essential component of Byrne JAG is its flexibility and support for local innovation. It helps communities work to address the underlying causes of crime and encourages collaboration between government and the communities it serves.

Congress can ensure that Byrne-JAG continues to receive adequate funding in FY2027 to help communities of all sizes improve their safety by returning the grant programs to their FY2010 level of $520 million.

ABOUT IDA

IDA is the premier organization for urban place professionals who are shaping and activating dynamic city center districts. Our members are city builders and downtown champions who bring urban centers to life, bridging the gap between the public and private sectors. We represent an industry of more than 2,500 place management organizations, employing 100,000 people throughout North America and growing rapidly around the world. Founded in 1954, IDA is a resource center for ideas and innovative best practices in urban place management. For more information, visit downtown.org.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Andrew Goldberg, Principal, Agora at andrew@agoragov.com or 202.321.1877

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