



Fresno County Sheriff's Office
Margaret Mims, Sheriff **April 23, 2008**
News Release

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MEDIA ADVISORY: State Sends Mixed Messages In Tackling Gangs

Fresno, CA.-

Despite awarding over \$1.5 million dollars in funding to address gangs in Fresno County through the Governor's CalGRIP Initiative, the State Senate is now sending a mixed message on their true commitment to address gangs. April 21, 2008 the Senate denied the Office of Emergency Services (OES) request for \$1.3 million in 2008-09 to establish the Office of Gang and Youth Violence Policy (OGYVP) per Chapter 459, Statutes of 2007 (AB 1381). This action would leave \$731,000 (\$446,000 General Fund and \$285,000 administrative funds from the gang grants) to fund the operations of the Office.

Chapter 459 established the OGYVP in the OES to identify and evaluate state, local, and federal gang and youth violence suppression, intervention, and prevention programs, strategies, and funding sources. The bill also established the Director of the OGYVP and the Chief Deputy Director positions, and required the OGYVP to establish an internet website in coordination with OES that provides an internet hyperlink to the various grants administered by the OES and technical assistance on the process for applying for those grants. Per the legislation, the Director would also be responsible for monitoring, assessing, and coordinating the state's anti-gang programs to maximize the effectiveness and coordination of those programs, strategies, and resources. In addition, the OGYVP would develop a comprehensive set of recommendations, in consultation with community-based organizations serving at-risk populations and neighborhoods, law enforcement, educators, the courts, policy experts, scholars, and local policymakers to define its mission, role, and responsibilities as the statewide entity dedicated to reducing gang and youth violence.

Under the guidance of the CalGRIP Initiative, County Sheriffs, District Attorneys, Municipal Police Chiefs, educators, community and faith-based organizations, and residents are coming together for collaborative comprehensive approaches to addressing gang crime and violence. Statewide coordination of anti-gang programs is essential to maximize programs, strategies and resources. Despite a financial crisis that threatens the State budget it is irresponsible to cut funding to the OGYVP at a point in time when significant strides are in development. *“We desperately need the OGYVP to help our communities, law enforcement, educators and local policymakers as the statewide body committed to reducing gang and youth violence and making reducing gangs a reality”* outlines Sheriff Margaret Mims. *“The commitment and swift action from law enforcement is there, the realization that prevention and intervention are also key elements is there; the OGYVP needs the resources to effectively execute their responsibilities as outlined by California law, which represents critical support.”*

According to the Department of Justice (DOJ), California has 3,700 gangs with more than 420,000 gang members. *“This is not an issue that has blossomed overnight, and is not something that can be addressed by a quick fix or instituting another program”* comments Debra McKenzie, Fresno County Gang Task Force Coordinator. *“The efforts of OGYVP to institute evaluation measures, assessments, monitoring and coordination are going to be key to building and supporting the capacity of systems across the state to truly have an impact.”*

“The safety of the public and reducing the growing trend of gangs should be the first obligation of our government,”* said Selma Police Chief Tom Whiteside. *“Our cities recognize the importance of OGYVP and we need their help. As a rural Police Chief I feel like it is a slap in the face to cut the very thing we have needed the most. Law enforcement personnel from communities large and small believe OGYVP is essential to fighting the war on gangs. We cannot afford to slash the funding for such a vital program that can contribute successfully to keeping young kids out of gangs and making our neighborhoods safer.”