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Statement of Tom Cochran, Executive Director, U.S. Conference of Mayors

On President Bush's Proposed FY'05 Budget

"The nation's mayors believe that in order to keep America strong, Congress and the Administration must responsibly invest in cities and local communities, which are the engines that drive this nation's economy.

"Based on sentiments expressed by the nation's mayors assembled last month at the 72nd Winter Meeting of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, we applaud the Administration for funding certain programs in line with our key priorities, but are concerned with the decrease of funding in others.

"Since 9-11, mayors across this nation, of cities large and small, have committed additional resources to fight the war on terror. While we recognize that the budget calls for increases for the high-threat, high-density urban areas program, mayors are greatly concerned that this additional money comes at the expense of reduced funding of $1 billion in state block grants and serious cuts in the overall funding for first responders, including the firefighters assistance program.

"Speaking to mayors last month at the Conference's Winter Meeting, President Bush promised to help "unstick" homeland security money that is still log-jammed at the state level. We look forward to working with President Bush on fixing the flawed distribution system.

"Additionally, mayors are disappointed and remain very concerned that the Administration proposes to practically eliminate the Community Oriented Policing (COPS) program by reducing funding by 80% and completely cutting the Local Law Enforcement Block Grant (LLEBG). Many cities use the COPS and LLEBG money to put additional police officers on the streets. We must not neglect the fight against street crime and escalating gang violence while we secure our cities against terrorist threats.

"The nation's affordable housing and homeless crisis demands federal action. Therefore, we applaud the President for proposing an increase in funding for the HOME Investment Partnerships program, which expands the supply for affordable housing. We also commend the President on the new $200 million American Dream Downpayment program which will help thousands of families become homeowners.

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“However, mayors are disappointed that this budget recommends a $300 million cut to the popular Community Development Block Grant (CDBG). For 30 years, CDBG has given local governments the flexibility to address community needs. This cut will negatively impact cities nationwide.

“Mayors have supported brownfields redevelopment for over a decade. We are concerned that this budget completely eliminates funding for redevelopment of brownfield sites which are a crucial environmental and economic priority for our cities.

“We applaud the President for significantly increasing the National Endowment for the Arts budget by $18 million from $121 million to $139 million. This is the largest increase since 1984.

“Mayors are concerned that the Administration’s proposal for Amtrak could force a likely shutdown in 2005. The $900 million proposed is $318 million, or 26%, below the level of funding recently agreed to in the 2004 Omnibus Spending Bill. With cities all over America suffering from a crumbling and congested transportation infrastructure, mayors know that a major investment is needed to ensure healthy cities.

“The Administration’s budget also includes language that would impose severe restrictions on tax deductions that can be used by companies that lease equipment and property to state and local governments. Mayors are especially concerned that this provision could eliminate a popular tool used by many cities to finance infrastructure projects, and end up costing local governments billions of dollars.

“The mayors of this nation look forward to working with the President on other initiatives, including faith-based and the prison re-entry program. As the President has proposed this budget, now the Congress must act. We are committed to supporting our key priorities as this process goes forward.”

A full budget analysis by the U.S. Conference of Mayors can be found online at usmayors.org.

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The U.S. Conference of Mayors is the official nonpartisan organization of cities with populations of 30,000 or more. There are 1,139 such cities in the country today. Each city is represented in the Conference by its chief elected official, the mayor. The primary roles of the Conference of Mayors are to promote the development of effective national urban/suburban policy; strengthen federal-city relationships; ensure that federal policy meets urban needs; provide mayors with leadership and management tools; and create a forum in which mayors can share ideas and information. More information about the Conference is available at usmayors.org.