

ARSON-FOR-PROFIT: ITS IMPACT ON STATES AND LOCALITIES

HEARINGS BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS OF THE COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS UNITED STATES SENATE NINETY-FIFTH CONGRESS FIRST SESSION DECEMBER 14 AND 15, 1977

Printed for the use of the Committee on Governmental Affairs

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✓ PREPARED STATEMENT OF GLEN D. KING, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,  
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF CHIEFS OF POLICE

Senator Glenn, members of the Senate Governmental Affairs Subcommittee, Ladies and Gentlemen, I thank you for the opportunity to appear before this committee to explain the position of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, relative to the Uniform Crime classification of arson.

I am Glen D. King, Executive Director of the International Association of Chiefs of Police, Inc., with headquarters located at Eleven Firstfield Road, Gaithersburg, Maryland.

The IACP is a membership organization of police executives. Our organization represents approximately 11,200 members in 56 different nations. The Association was organized in 1893 with the specified goals of encouraging cooperation and exchange of information among police administrators, and promoting the highest possible standards of performance and conduct within the police profession.

The IACP, as an independent membership Association, has the responsibility to represent the interests of its members and to advocate positions that are supported by our law enforcement executive membership. As an independent Association, the IACP remains free to respond to the needs of law enforcement promptly and efficiently, without fear of political reprisal or bureaucratic entanglement.

Concerning national Uniform Crime Reporting, it was the IACP that began work in this area in 1922 in response to expressed needs for reliable information about the incidence and type of crime being committed. A voluntary national program of collecting crime statistics was initiated in 1930 by the IACP Committee on Uniform Crime Records. In that same year, the Federal Bureau of Investigation was authorized by the Congress of the United States to serve as the national clearinghouse for the IACP-developed statistical crime information collection program.

The IACP Committee on Uniform Crime Records continues to serve in an advisory capacity to the FBI, concerning the operation of this program. In this capacity, the IACP plays an active and effective role through comprehensive studies of police records and crime reporting systems; through Audit/Evaluations of agency UCR data; as the voice of local law enforcement; as a sounding board for police executives who voluntarily contribute to the program; as a review board for policy changes recommended by local police executives, the various state UCR program managers, the FBI-UCR Section and other interested parties.

In attempting to provide as complete a picture of crime in the United States as possible, the Committee on Uniform Crime Records of the IACP, in 1930, chose to obtain data from the sphere of offenses known to the police. After a thorough study of all crime reported to the police, it was apparent

that complete collection was impractical because of the vast numbers of crimes reported in all categories and through a multitude of criminal codes. It was determined that a meaningful overview or barometer of total crime could be gauged from the examination of a few crimes with standardized national definitions.

The IACP, in concert with a distinguished panel of international law enforcement administrators, criminologists, academicians, and leaders of concerned public and private institutions, selected, after lengthy study, those crimes which would serve most effectively as an index to estimate the trends in the volume of all crimes occurring in the Nation. The Index Crimes, as selected by this distinguished panel, are:

- Murder
- Forcible rape
- Robbery
- Aggravated assault
- Burglary
- Larceny/theft
- Motor vehicle theft

Many other categories of crime, that might be indicators of total crime, could have been chosen for inclusion. Many other serious crimes such as

child molesting, incest, kidnap, embezzlement, counterfeiting, bombing, extortion, narcotic offenses and yes, certainly, arson were given serious consideration as total crime indicators.

The seven Index Crimes which were chosen represent a fair measure of total crime in the United States by virtue of their:

- Seriousness
- Frequency of occurrence
- Likelihood of being reported to the police

The idea of adding to, or otherwise changing, the list of Index Crimes is frequently considered by the UCR Committee.

As you are aware, the UCR Committee, at its September, 1976, meeting in Miami Beach, Florida, again considered the issue of arson as a potential Index Crime. The Committee unanimously agreed that arson not be designated as an Index Crime for the following reasons:

- Arson, like many other crimes not tabulated in the Index, does not always readily appear to be a crime at the time of occurrence.
- Arson infrequently comes to the attention of law enforcement at the offense stage; it more normally surfaces at the arrest stage and, thus, would not be a true indicator of the crime in the month of occurrence.
- Most police agencies are inadequately trained in the area of Fire Science.

- Arson is often not reported to law enforcement agencies but, rather, to fire authorities.
- There is presently no uniform system of reporting and analyzing fire statistics.
- Approximately 85 percent of all fire fighters serve in a voluntary capacity. This fact, although complimentary to those who volunteer, results in substandard reporting and substandard investigation into the causes of fire.
- The inclusion of arson as an Index Crime would require the development of a disciplined UCR Program in some 25,000 fire departments and countless state and local fire marshal offices nationwide.
- Local legislation designating authority to investigate fires is not uniform. In many jurisdictions this authority is given legislatively only to the fire service.
- The law enforcement executives do not have sufficient authority to adequately control voluntary reporting, by standardized definition, from the numerous fire service agencies that would have to report arson.
- We agree that more accurate statistical data regarding the crime of arson is needed, but conclude that the various state fire marshal offices might be a more appropriate central point of collection.
- The UCR hierarchy rule, in many instances, would not allow the

scoring of arson when a murder, burglary, larceny or other Index Crime occurred within the same incident.

- In every instance when an individual unlawfully enters a building and commits a felony-arson, the crime of burglary is now scored. In the event that arson was included as an Index offense at 08 in the hierarchy, the exact same scoring would occur, i. e. burglary.
- Where a fire is started to cover up another crime--murder, burglary, larceny--a multiple of offenses has occurred, but under the rules of hierarchy, only the most serious ONE can be scored, i. e. the highest on the list. In this example, only murder would be scored.
- The problems resulting from arson crimes would not be alleviated significantly by classifying arson as an Index offense.

Let me conclude by saying that the members of the International Association of Chiefs of Police do not dispute the fact that arson is a serious crime. We in law enforcement will continue to seek the prevention of arson and attempt to apprehend arsonists within the full authority granted by the law.

It is our genuine belief, however, that the reasoning against classifying arson as an Index Crime is persuasive.

I again thank you for allowing me the opportunity to present the views of the International Association of Chiefs of Police.

**END**