

Rep. Peter Welch today voted in favor of the COPS Improvements Act, a bill that would bolster community policing efforts by hiring 50,000 police officers over the next five years. The measure, which was cosponsored by Welch, passed the House this afternoon on a vote of 342 to 78.

The bill, which is designed to reinvigorate Community Oriented Policing Services grants, could result in the hiring of as many as 109 police officers in Vermont, according to congressional estimates.

Since it was created in 1994, the COPS program has contributed to a significant drop in crime nationwide. However, a recent survey of more than 200 police departments showed that 44 percent of the departments surveyed reported an increase of crime since the start of the ongoing economic recession, while more than a quarter of the departments reported hiring freezes for new officers.

"Now is not the time to cut jobs in law enforcement," Welch said. "Rather, we must bolster our commitment to keeping our communities safe and ensuring that Vermont law enforcement authorities have the resources they need to do their job."

The COPS Program has received significant support in the Senate from Sen. Patrick Leahy, who is shepherding a similar bill through the Senate Judiciary Committee and who pushed for additional COPS funding to be included in the recently enacted recovery package.