

**Jerry L. Demings**  
Orange County Sheriff (Florida)  
President's Task Force on 21<sup>st</sup> Century Policing Testimony  
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Good morning Commissioner Ramsey, Professor Robinson and all members of the Task Force. It is indeed an honor and privilege for me to provide testimony to the sixth public listening session on the topic of Officer Safety and Wellness. Particularly my comments will include recommendations for the Task Force to consider in the area of Officer Safety.

As I provide testimony today, I believe it is necessary to first establish the perspective from which I speak. This is my 34th year as a law enforcement officer working in the local communities of Metropolitan Orlando. I have been a chief executive for 16 of those years and have experienced line of duty deaths of my officers or deputies nine times during that period. In fact, February 11 marked the one year anniversary of the death of one of my deputies, Deputy Jonathan Scott Pine, who was feloniously shot and killed by a burglary suspect. He left behind a wife and three children under the age of seven. In May of this year, Deputy Pine's name will be added to the list of more than 20,000 names on the National Law Enforcement Memorial here in the nation's Capitol.

The first step in improving officer safety and wellness is to understand the range and scope of hazards police face in the line of duty. According to the Officer Down Memorial Page, as of February 18, 2015, line of duty deaths are down 7% in 2015, with auto-related deaths the same as last year. So far in 2015, officer deaths by gunfire are down 80%. That is good news considering the trend from last year. According to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, preliminary data indicates that 126 law enforcement officers died in the line of

duty in 2014, a 24 percent increase from 2013 when 102 officers were killed. For the first time in many years, firearms-related fatalities accounted for 50 deaths, increasing by 56% from 2013 when 32 officers were killed.

On average, over the last decade, there have been approximately 59,000 assaults against law enforcement officers each year, resulting in approximately 15,000 injuries. I share these numbers because in order to have a comprehensive discussion about officer safety, we must first understand what we are dealing with. The conversation should not only be about those who have died, but must also focus on those who live and what can be done to prevent injury to officers. I believe it is wonderful that the Task Force is having listening sessions to hear about best practices from around the nation that could improve officer safety.

As a career lawman, I subscribe to an edict that “there is no substitute for training and experience” in striving for optimum officer safety. Fundamentally, I believe that many of the deaths and/or injuries to law enforcement officers can be prevented through training that is both realistic and repetitive. The use of simulation technology should be seriously considered in modern day police training. We should immerse our officers in training that realistically depicts what they are likely going to experience in real world situations. Training academies should focus on role-plays and scenario-based training utilizing technology that can give officers immediate feedback on both their success and failures in officer safety. My agency, the Orange County Sheriff’s Office, entered a partnership with our local law enforcement training academy (Valencia College) to acquire and house a simulator. Deputies and officers use training ammunition or simulated firearms in animated scenarios that require them to make split-second decisions. The goal is to teach them skills that would help keep them safe in high risk situations. Repetitive training is important for officers to remain proficient in the use of defensive tactics.

Therefore, it is recommended that agencies conduct high liability training several times each year for all officers. It is also recommended that agencies invite representatives from the media to participate in training scenarios using simulation. Perhaps this will give both the media and members of the public a better perspective on the complexity of “split-second” decision-making by law enforcement officers.

In that each year a significant number of law enforcement officers die in vehicle-related accidents, we must talk about what can be done to prevent or reduce traffic related deaths. One of the promising initiatives is the “Below 100” Campaign that began in 2010. The number of officers who died in the line of duty has not been below 100 since 1944. The campaign was developed by the International Law Enforcement Educators and Trainers Association with the goal of reducing line of duty deaths. It is being embraced by many law enforcement agencies throughout the nation and is based on five tenets: Wear your seatbelt, Wear your vest, Watch your speed, WIN – What’s important now, and Remember that complacency kills. This curriculum is being taught by law enforcement trainers and should be institutionalized in their various training segments and organizational culture. These five tenets are simple easy to remember tips for 21<sup>st</sup> century officers. Reminding officers to wear their seatbelts and vests may sound simple, but the research is clear that many officers are injured because they don’t do these five things. Many of the officer-involved traffic crashes are caused by officers who are driving too fast for conditions. This causes preventable injury to the officers and citizens; it results in tremendous liability to agencies and is avoidable. The Police Chief magazine reports that 37 percent of all law enforcement fatalities between 1997 and 2006 were caused by vehicle-related accidents. Sadly, I must say that of the nine officers who died in the line of duty under my watch as a chief executive, two of them died in preventable automobile crashes (Officers Robert

Montgomery and Tanja King). Their names are on the Memorial Walls in Florida and Washington, DC. Consequently, in 2014, we instituted a “Below 100” training program at the Orange County Sheriff’s Office. Our goal is to improve deputy driving behaviors, reduce deputy injury due to traffic crashes and to improve overall officer safety. In addition, we have invested in new vehicles with collision avoidance technology such as backing sensors and cameras, and lane directional indicators.

It is recommended that as agencies replace their fleet of vehicles, serious consideration should be given to the purchase of vehicles with collision avoidance technology.

Since the events of September 11, 2001, our nation has remained under the threat of domestic terrorism and it is law enforcement that has the dubious responsibility of combating terror. According to the FBI Law Enforcement Bulletin, sovereign citizens pose a growing domestic threat to law enforcement. They are individuals who are extremists without established leadership with core beliefs that the U.S. government has no authority or jurisdiction over them. This movement is alive and flourishing throughout the nation. In fact, on February 8, 2015, several of my deputies encountered an armed individual who had made it known to others that he was anti-government and would shoot it out with the police if he encountered them. After being notified that the subject was in violation of a domestic violence injunction by attempting to make contact with a former girlfriend, Orange Deputies responded to the parking lot of a Publix and immediately encountered multiple rounds of gunfire. Fearing for their safety, the deputies returned fire and mortally wounded the individual.

According to the Orlando Sentinel, over the past decade, more than a dozen police officers and members of the anti-government movement have died nationwide in gun battles. Last year, the

National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Response to Terrorism at the University of Maryland found that a study of U.S. police officers determined sovereign citizens to be the greatest threat to police. It is recommended that more first responder training be provided on the topic of domestic terrorism and in particular, the sovereign citizen movement.

Lastly, the sum total of law enforcement experiences provides a great body of knowledge that can be shared for training purposes. The International Association of Chiefs of Police, the National Sheriffs Association and the Police Executive Research Forum are representative organizations that provide excellent research and training opportunities for modern day policing.

In summary, this discussion was not intended to be all-inclusive about what should be done to improve officer safety across the nation; instead, this was designed to scratch the surface and focus the discussion of key recommendations on promising strategies to reduce line of duty deaths and injuries.

- Develop training that is realistic and repetitive to include simulation technology;
- Conduct high liability training several times each year for all officers;
- Invite media participation in simulation training to enhance transparency and build trust;
- Conduct “Below 100” training;
- Invest in new vehicle collision avoidance technology; and
- Increase first-responder training on domestic terror, specifically the sovereign citizen movement.

## Sources:

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