

**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE PRESIDENT'S TASK FORCE
ON 21st CENTURY POLICING
The Officer Safety and Wellness Listening Session
Presented by
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National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund
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For the past 30 years, our nonprofit organization, the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, has been devoted to telling the story of policing in America and making it safer for those who serve. Our vision is to inspire every citizen to value law enforcement. One of the best ways we can show our officers how much they are valued is by doing everything possible to ensure their safety and well-being. Let me offer my deepest thanks to this Task Force for making officer safety and wellness such a high priority.

I would like to begin by offering some facts and figures that should help to frame the issue we are here to discuss. There are now 20,267 names on the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial here in Washington, DC. Those names belong to federal, state, local, tribal and territorial law enforcement professionals who have died in the line of duty. The first known line of duty death occurred on October 22, 1791; a Columbia County (NY) Sheriff named Cornelius Hogeboom. Sheriff Hogeboom was shot and killed serving a writ of ejectment. Of the 20,267 officers on the Memorial: 11,255 (55 percent) were killed by gunfire; 5,785 (29 percent) died in traffic-related incidents; and 3,227 (16 percent) died due to other causes.

The 1920s were the deadliest decade in law enforcement history, with an average of 242 officer fatalities each year. The deadliest year was 1930, when 301 deaths occurred; and the single incident that resulted in the greatest loss of life was September 11, 2001, when 72 officers were killed as a result of the terrorist attacks. An ominous milestone occurred in 1944, the last year that fewer than 100 officers died in the line of duty.

Our records show that over the past 10 years, the United States has averaged 146 line-of-duty deaths annually, which equates to one officer fatality every 60 hours. The FBI has reported that more than 57,000 officers are assaulted each year by criminals (based on the 10 year average from 2004-2013). And, based on reporting by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, more than 100,000 law enforcement professionals are injured in the line of duty on an annual basis.

As troubling as these statistics are, the number of line-of-duty deaths among officers has actually dropped dramatically since the 1970s, a decade that saw an average of 231 officer deaths each year. This means that the average annual number of line-of-duty deaths this past decade (146) is 37 percent fewer than it was in the 1970s, and this drop occurred at a time when the number of officers serving this dangerous profession more than doubled.

Some of the factors that are thought to have played a role in this officer fatality reduction include: increased use of soft body armor; better training; less-lethal weaponry; tougher criminal justice; an overall drop in violent crime; improved emergency medical care; and a greater emphasis on officer safety.

We still have a lot of room for improvement when it comes to officer safety and wellness, however. Just consider the experience in Canada. Three years ago, I attended their nation's annual memorial service. They honored just one fallen officer who had died in the line of duty during the prior 12 months nationwide. The last two years, Canada has lost fewer than 10 officers annually. In a conversation I had with Toronto Police Chief Bill Blair, he cited the following as just some of the reasons for Canada's outstanding officer safety record:

- **A “Guaranteed Arrival” program that emphasizes the need for officers to reach their call for service safely above all else—he indicated this had reduced traffic crashes at his department by 70 percent.**

- **Mandatory seatbelt and vest wear policies for officers.**
- **Sensors in vehicles checking speed and seatbelt usage, along with in-car cameras—officers know they are being monitored for safety policy compliance.**
- **An aggressive education campaign that shows officers what happens in a crash with and without seatbelts.**
- **An Officer Safety Committee that meets once a month.**
- **An aggressive public education campaign that promotes Canada’s “Move Over/Slow Down” laws.**

The following are some troubling officer safety and wellness concerns that our organization has identified:

- In 2014, 24 percent of the officers killed in the line of duty were not wearing body armor (down from 31 percent in 2013).
- In 2014, 32 percent of officers killed in auto crashes were not wearing seatbelts (down from 54 percent in 2013).
- In 2014, 55 percent of the officers who died in auto crashes were killed in single-vehicle crashes (up from 52 percent in 2013).
- In 2014, 15 officers were shot and killed in ambush-style attacks, triple the number in 2013.
- There has been a 30 percent increase in the number of officers killed by drunk drivers since the 1980s.
- Job-related heart attacks claimed the lives of 125 officers over the past 10 years, including 14 in 2014.

- According to the FBI's "Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted Report" for 2013, 149 cop killers from 2004 thru 2013 were out on parole, probation or some other form of judicial supervision when they murdered a law officer.

I want to take a moment to express my personal appreciation to Attorney General Holder for making officer safety and wellness one of his Administration's top priorities. One of the initiatives he launched was the National Officer Safety and Wellness Group, of which I am proud to be an active member. Among some of the recommendations raised by members of the Group include:

- **Create an environment that rewards officers for safe behavior.**
- **Must have unified safety messages with buy-in from the unions.**
- **Establish a national clearinghouse for best practices.**
- **Emphasize a safety message daily (e.g., wear your vest, wear your seatbelt, drive slower and safer, and never take any assignment for granted).**
- **Establish a hands free policy for use of phones and other devices while vehicles are in motion (make Bluetooth devices available to employees).**
- **Use blank screen technology where the laptop shuts down when vehicle gets to a certain speed.**
- **Agency heads/supervisors should lead by example.**
- **Get buy-in from elected officials—show them cost-benefit data.**
- **Establish an officer safety committee comprised of union and management representatives.**
- **Hire a safety officer.**
- **Take a data-driven approach to safety—"If it matters, measure it."**

- **Bring families into the safety messaging.**
- **Change the culture. Do not accept/tolerate injuries and fatalities as “just part of the job.”**

The COPS Office at the Department of Justice has funded a study our organization is currently doing into calls for service that resulted in officer fatalities. We are looking at cases from the last five years. Among some of the initial troubling findings are: officers failing to wait for backup and entering dangerous situations alone; many officers crashing their vehicles while rushing to assist a fellow officer; and officers being killed with their own weapon.

Finally, I want to highlight some of the innovative officer safety and wellness initiatives our staff has uncovered at agencies around the country as part of a study we are doing with the Bureau of Justice Assistance. We call it, “Destination Zero.” At an awards dinner this coming May, we will be honoring the top safety and wellness programs that we have found. Among the 75 innovative ideas already being considered are:

- **A “Fit Deputy” fitness program in Orange County (FL) that covers not only physical fitness, but nutrition, financial health and stress reduction.**
- **An “Arrive Alive” program launched by the Prince George’s County (MD) Police Department, which has significantly increased officer seatbelt use.**
- **Deployable speed humps designed to slow vehicles entering crash scenes.**
- **Tactical Emergency Casualty Care (TECC) Kits or the similar Downed Officer Kits (DOKs), which provide officers with tourniquets and other life-saving equipment.**

The best news of all is that more attention is being placed on officer safety and wellness than ever before. A cultural change is occurring and I thank this Task Force for your leadership.