

**Statement of Senator Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.),
Ranking Member, Senate Judiciary Committee
Executive Business Meeting
May 12, 2016**

Mr. Chairman, yesterday you noticed a judicial nominations hearing for next Wednesday. The glaring omission from that agenda was Chief Judge Merrick Garland. Chief Judge Garland has submitted an updated questionnaire to the Committee, including more than 2,000 pages of material related to his qualifications. Chief Judge Garland has done his part, and now it is time for this Committee to do its job. My staff and I are looking at his record carefully, and I expect Senate Republicans are doing the same. There is no reason we cannot move forward with a hearing next week that includes the Supreme Court nominee. We need to do our jobs on this Committee.

Unfortunately, Senate Republicans are blocking any action on Chief Judge Garland's nomination. That is wrong. This Committee should not continue to undermine the Supreme Court's ability to serve its role under the Constitution as our Nation's final arbiter of law. We can hold a hearing and confirm Chief Judge Garland by this summer. That would give the Supreme Court a full bench to hear cases in the next Term. We have already seen the Court deadlock in three cases. Let's get to work. Let's review Chief Judge Garland's questionnaire and materials, and let's hold a hearing as soon as possible.

On another note, every year we commemorate National Police Week. Tomorrow the names of 252 fallen officers will join more than 20,000 others enshrined on the walls of the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial. Among those who will be added to the wall is Vermont State Trooper Kyle Young, who tragically died in the line of duty last September.

This is a time to honor Trooper Young and others we have lost, and also consider what more can be done to protect our officers. Nearly 20 years ago, I helped create the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Program, which has provided more than 1.2 million vests to over 13,000 law enforcement agencies. On Tuesday, the House passed the Leahy-Graham Bulletproof Vest Partnership reauthorization bill. Over 200,000 officers will receive life-saving vests as a result. Vests purchased through this program will help keep names off that wall. I thank Senator Graham for being the lead cosponsor of my bill, and I look forward to the President signing it into law.

Today, I hope we report the POLICE Act, sponsored by Senator Cornyn, myself, and many others on Committee. This legislation will help provide local law enforcement with important training to handle active shooter situations, which have become all too common and place both officers and our communities at risk.

I also hope that can report the Justice for All Reauthorization Act. I thank Senator Cornyn, as well as many other Senators from both sides of the aisle for working with me on this important legislation. The Justice for All Act first passed in 2004, when the House and Senate had Republican majorities, and it was signed into law by President George W. Bush. This is a strong example of what we can accomplish when we work together. It should serve as a model for us.

The bill includes improvements to the Crime Victims' Rights Act to ensure that the voices of victims are heard and their right to protection, fairness, and participation in criminal proceedings is respected. I want to thank Senator Feinstein for all she has done over the years to advance this important cause.

This legislation also contains the Innocence Protection Act, a major piece of which is the Kirk Bloodsworth program for post-conviction DNA testing. This program is near and dear to my heart. Kirk is now a friend of mine. He was the first person exonerated from death row by DNA evidence. And this program, named in his honor, will help ensure others do not face that ultimate injustice of being imprisoned and even facing the death penalty for a crime you did not commit. Last year alone DNA led to the exoneration of at least 26 people.

The legislation also includes provisions to improve the quality of indigent defense to ensure that all people charged with a crime are adequately represented, whether they are rich or poor, and that evidence is retained and made available for post-conviction testing where appropriate.

Altogether, this bill will result in a fairer criminal justice system. We have received letters of support from a long list of law enforcement, victim services and civil rights organizations, including the National Sheriffs Association, the National Center for Victims of Crime, the Innocence Project, and the National Network to End Sexual Violence.

I hope the other Committee members will join us in supporting this commonsense bipartisan legislation.

#####