

Testimony of

The Honorable Orrin Hatch

July 23, 2002

STATEMENT OF SENATOR ORRIN G. HATCH
RANKING REPUBLICAN MEMBER
Before the SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
Hearing on

"Law Enforcement Officers Safety Act, S. 2480"

I want to begin by thanking Chairman Leahy for holding this important hearing today on S. 2480, the "Law Enforcement Officers Safety Act." Enactment of S. 2480 will help protect the American public, our Nation's law enforcement officers, and their families by exempting qualified active and retired law enforcement officers from certain local and State prohibitions on the carrying of concealed firearms. I am proud to cosponsor with Senator Leahy this legislation that has the support of over 100 federal, state and local police organizations, including the Fraternal Order of Police, the National Troopers Coalition, the National Sheriff's Association, and the Law enforcement Alliance of America. The 30 Senate cosponsors and 267 House cosponsors symbolize the widespread and bipartisan support this legislation commands on Capitol Hill, and I am hopeful that it will become law this year.

I agree with Lieutenant Young and the FOP that this legislation is about officer safety and not about guns. The Law Enforcement Officers Safety Act permits qualified law enforcement officers and retired officers to carry, with the appropriate identification, a concealed firearm that has been shipped or transported in interstate or foreign commerce regardless of State or local laws. Our legislation clearly defines what is meant by "qualified law enforcement officer" and "qualified retired law enforcement officer" to ensure that those individuals permitted to carry concealed firearms are highly trained professionals. This reasonable and sensible approach will go a long way in providing off-duty and retired officers the security they need, and deserve, to protect themselves and others at all times.

I understand that some have voiced concern that this legislation may encroach on State laws. While our legislation puts the safety of law enforcement officers and the public first, it also respects State laws that permit private persons to prohibit or restrict the possession of concealed weapons on their properties, and that prohibit or restrict the possession of firearms on any State or local government properties, installations, buildings, bases or parks.

The valiant men and women who dedicate their lives to protecting the public are not capable of turning off their sense of duty when they happen to be out of uniform. They and their families accept that this dedication exposes them to risks of retaliation and vengeance at all times. This legislation not only will provide law enforcement officers with a legal means to protect themselves and their families when they travel interstate, it will also provide added security to

the American public. By enabling qualified active duty and retired law enforcement officers to carry firearms while off-duty, retired or outside their own jurisdictions, more trained law enforcement officers will be on our streets to enforce the law and to respond to crises.

I look forward to hearing from all of our witnesses who will be testifying to their first-hand knowledge of and experience with law enforcement safety issues. Specifically, I commend Lieutenant Young for his 25 years of service, and his commitment to representing the interests of law enforcement officials across the country. The American public is grateful for law enforcement officials' dedication to protecting our families and communities. That level of dedication doesn't wane when an officer is off-duty or retired, and it only makes sense that qualified officers be allowed to serve the public at all times in a safe manner. I will continue to work with Chairman Leahy and my colleagues in both Houses to ensure that the Law Enforcement Officers Safety Act is signed into law this year.

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