

Testimony of

# The Honorable Max Baucus

July 23, 2002

Mr. Chairman and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank-you for allowing me testify today on such an important piece of legislation B the Law Enforcement Officers Safety Act, or S. 2480. I would like to commend you, Mr. Chairman, for introducing S. 2480 and I am proud to be an original co-sponsor of that bill.

The Law Enforcement Officers Safety Act is really a very simple bill, Mr. Chairman, that will pay enormous dividends for the American people. It will allow qualified active duty and retired law enforcement officers to carry their weapons, regardless of state and local restrictions on carrying concealed firearms. The Act will also allow these officers to carry their weapons across state and other jurisdictional lines.

Mr. Chairman, S. 2480 addresses a critical officer safety and public safety need. Law enforcement officers are trained professionals and dedicated public servants. They are sworn to uphold the law and protect the citizens of this country. They are always on duty, even when they're not in uniform or patrolling a beat. After September 11, the role of law enforcement officers in our communities is even more important, as they constitute our front-line defense against terrorism here at home.

It just makes sense to make sure law enforcement officers have the means to protect themselves and the public at all times, because they could be called upon to protect themselves or the public at any time. It particularly makes sense in rural states like Montana, where law enforcement officers are stretched thin because they have so much territory to cover.

Mr. Chairman, S. 2480 will enhance public safety by allowing the nation to tap into the wealth of training and knowledge that is our law enforcement community, without costing the federal taxpayer a dime. Law enforcement officers have training and expertise in detecting and preventing crime that ordinary citizens just don't have. S. 2480 will make sure that officers can maximize that training in the event of an emergency, regardless of jurisdiction, and regardless of whether an officer was officially on duty.

I also think S. 2480 does a good job balancing the rights of states and private citizens, by preserving state laws that permit private citizens to prohibit concealed weapons on their own property, and state laws that ban firearms on state or local property. It also makes sure that only qualified law enforcement officers with training in the proper use of firearms would be exempt from state and local laws prohibiting concealed weapons.

In short, Mr. Chairman, I urge this Committee to mark-up and pass S. 2480, and send it to the Senate floor as soon as possible. It is vital that we take advantage of every available opportunity to enhance our law enforcement capabilities and protect our citizens.