

Testimony of

# Det. David Azur

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Good morning. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is David Azur and I'm a Detective with the Baltimore Police Department in Maryland. I would like to share with you why I believe so strongly in the importance of every police officer wearing a bulletproof vest.

I've been a police officer since 1993 and became a Detective in 1997. On July 24, 2000 I was a member of a multi-jurisdictional auto theft task force. Our goal was to apprehend car thieves while they were driving stolen cars. I was working in plain clothes and was operating an unmarked sport utility vehicle. I wore a PACA bulletproof vest in a black tactical vest carrier over my shirt. The vest was clearly marked "POLICE" in big, bold letters. It was issued to me by the Baltimore Police Department in August of 1995.

At approximately 12:30 in the afternoon, I observed a suspected stolen vehicle traveling northbound on Pennsylvania Avenue in Baltimore City. With the assistance of additional units from the Auto Theft Task force, we stopped the vehicle at a red light on a busy main street in Baltimore. I approached the passenger side of the vehicle and spoke with both the driver and the passenger through an open window. My partner approached the driver side of the vehicle. I asked the driver "who owned the vehicle?" He said he obtained the vehicle from an unknown male earlier in the day and didn't know who owned the car. I told my partner to pull the driver out of the vehicle and to place him under arrest. I then removed the passenger from the vehicle and immediately got into a struggle with him. The car door was open and I had the suspect pinned up against the car between the open door and the passenger seat, my chest against his back. As I was restraining him, he attempted to grab something from his pocket, which I assumed were drugs that he was trying to dispose of. I had his left arm pinned to the top of the car and I grabbed his right arm. A third officer, who had arrived on the scene and was standing on the other side of the open passenger door, attempted to grab the suspect's right arm as well. Just as the officer grabbed the suspect's arm, the suspect rotated to his left and I heard a gunshot. Unbeknownst to me, the suspect had a .38 caliber revolver in his waist band, which he had grabbed with his right hand. He reached around his body, positioning the gun under his left armpit. When he rotated to the left he shot me at point blank range, dead center in my chest. The gunshot threw me back, but didn't knock me down. The suspect took off running and the two officers on the scene took off running after him. Nobody knew that I had been shot. Perhaps five to ten seconds later I heard a second gunshot, which was the suspect committing suicide. It was at that point that I felt the pain in my chest and realized that I had been shot. I gasped for air and shouted to an officer about 20 feet away from me that I had been shot. He was shocked and shouted back "What??" I told him that I had been shot. I then grabbed my handheld radio and alerted the police dispatcher that I had been shot and waited for help to arrive. I ripped off my vest and asked the officer "Where's the blood?!?" He told me that the bullet didn't go through the vest and I replied that it still hurt like hell! My chest bruised almost instantly and by the time the medic arrived on the scene I had a bruise the size of a volleyball.

I was taken to the University of Maryland's Shock Trauma Unit and was told that if I hadn't been wearing my bulletproof vest that in all likelihood I would have died. I was released from the hospital less than five hours after having been shot in the chest at point blank range. I suffered minor nerve damage, which I still have to this day, but it's a small price to pay for what could have happened if I hadn't been wearing my vest.

Many people view the day that I got shot as a terrible day, but I view it as just the opposite. I'm lucky to be alive and owe my life to my bulletproof vest. Every police officer should have a bulletproof vest. If there's anything that I can do or say to help officers obtain and wear their vest, then I would love to do it and feel as though it's the least that I can do. Thank you for your time.