

Testimony of

Lt. Michael Macarilla

May 13, 2008

Senator Leahy, distinguished members of the Committee, I am Lieutenant Michael Macarilla of the Vermont State Police.

This morning, I am honored to share with you the experiences my Department has had with the Bullet Proof Vest Partnership Grant Program from its inception, ten years ago.

The Vermont Department of Public Safety has had an extensive and successful working relationship with Senator Leahy and with the Bureau of Justice Assistance. In 1998, Senator Leahy co-sponsored the Bullet Proof Vest Partnership Grant Act at a time when our Department was regrouping in the aftermath of the so-called Colebrook Incident.

On August 19, 1997, a lone gunman killed four people in northern New Hampshire; including New Hampshire State Troopers Scott Phillips and Leslie Lord. The gunman also wounded four additional law enforcement officers in ambush fashion. The rampage began in New Hampshire, but moved into Vermont where the gunman was finally stopped by a combined force of Vermont, New Hampshire, and Federal law enforcement officers.

At that time, Vermont State Troopers did not have ballistic body armor provided by the Department. Each Trooper made the personal decision whether to purchase this life saving, yet expensive, equipment. As a result of extensive after-action reviews, the Vermont State Police committed to providing ballistic body armor to each member of the Department.

On the national level, Congress recognized the need to help local, county, and state law enforcement agencies by supporting the purchase of ballistic body armor through the Bullet Proof Vest Partnership Grant Act.

As administered by the Bureau of Justice Assistance, the Act has allowed the Vermont State Police to purchase over 350 sets of ballistic body armor over the last ten years. A credit to the provisions of the Act, the expense of this investment is half of what the actual cost for the Department would have been. This provides a savings to the Department that can be used for other equally critical needs. Although the Department was committed to the purchase of ballistic body armor regardless of the passage of the Act, certainly the force-multiplying effect of the Act should not be understated. While the dollar amounts may seem small by national standards, this support is often the critical difference when a small agency is faced with prioritizing how to spend limited dollars on what is truly, life saving equipment.

We understand that there is discussion concerning an option to permit the Bureau of Justice Assistance to waive the matching funds requirement of the Act. The Vermont Department of Public Safety supports that concept. The Bureau of Justice Assistance has been an outstanding partner with the states. Under the leadership of Director Domingo Herraiz, the Bureau has worked diligently to get funding resources and technical assistance out to the field with a minimum of bureaucratic hurdles. The authority to waive matching requirements for agencies that need that latitude will continue the proven effectiveness of BJA.

Vermont has been fortunate in not having the experience of other states with officers being wounded or killed by gunfire. The committee will continue to hear from law enforcement officers who owe their lives to the presence of this grant program.

In March of this year, Senator Leahy and Senator Specter traveled to Rutland, VT and heard testimony from Vermonters on the influx of more brazen, violent actions related to drug trafficking activity. Vermont is not immune to violence, and Vermont law enforcement is not immune to becoming the target of violent activity. The Vermont State Police and all Vermont law enforcement agencies are greatly indebted to the ongoing support we receive from your efforts in the combined justice assistance programs that are available to us. Your efforts to

protect us with programs such as the Bullet Proof Vest Partnership Grant Act allow us to protect our citizens.

Thank you for the honor and opportunity to offer testimony today.