

Statement of

The Honorable Russ Feingold

United States Senator
Wisconsin
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At the Senate Judiciary Committee Hearing On "The Bulletproof Vest Partnership Program: Protecting our Nation's Law Enforcement Officers"
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I want to start by thanking the Chairman for holding this important hearing and for his steadfast dedication to our state and local law enforcement officers.

The Bulletproof Vest Partnership Program (BVP), operated by the Department of Justice, provides funding to state and local law enforcement for up to 50 percent of the cost of bulletproof vests. In fiscal year 2007 alone, 172 jurisdictions in Wisconsin received awards under the BVP, totaling more than \$550,000 in funding for 2,463 life-saving vests. And those numbers pale in comparison to the longer term nationwide statistics: The BVP has provided law enforcement officers in 11,900 jurisdictions with nearly 450,000 new bulletproof vests since 1999.

As the testimony of the witnesses today will show, the necessity and effectiveness of these vests is not in question. What is in question, and it is an area where the federal government can assist, is their availability and funding. Funding for state and local law enforcement has been cut dramatically under the current administration's budget proposals, resulting in increased pressures on our officers on the ground. Congress, in partnership with states and local communities, has an obligation to provide the tools, technology and training that our nation's law enforcement officers need in order to protect our communities. Helping our law enforcement officers obtain bulletproof vests is one way the federal government can, and should, help.

Chairman Leahy has introduced a bill, S. 2511, to permit the Justice Department to waive the BVP matching funds requirement in the case of fiscal hardship. At a time when too many police departments are already facing cuts to essential programs and crime fighting initiatives, this is a sensible step.

This is a particularly appropriate time to consider this program because this week is National Police Week. It is a time when we honor the heroic law enforcement officers who have lost their lives in the line of duty, to protect us and our communities. Every day, thousands of brave men and women put on the uniform and provide a dangerous and important service. It is our responsibility, both as individuals and as members of Congress, to honor them, and to do our part in providing the tools that allow them to do their jobs as effectively and safely as possible.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.