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The Honorable Patrick J. Leahy
Chairman
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

9 March 2012

Dear Mr. Chairman,

I want to thank you again for affording me the opportunity to testify before the Committee on the Judiciary about the importance of the Bulletproof Vest Partnership (BVP) grant program and the need to reauthorize this program. I am happy to reply to the questions for the record posed by Senator Coons and to provide any other information with respect to this program.

Question #1:

In your experience representing many law enforcement professionals, what is the reaction you have heard regarding this program?

The reaction from our members has been uniformly positive. There is no doubt that we have thousands of members wearing soft body armor that is up to date because their agency was able to purchase or upgrade their soft body armor through the BVP program.

In addition, law enforcement agencies have reported that the online application process is easy to use, which is of great importance to smaller agencies.

Question #2:

How is the administration of the BVP program received at the state and local level?

It is very well received. Users and applicants have reported a high level of satisfaction with the administrative end of the program.

Question #3:

Do you believe the current system of matching funds is sufficient to ensure that every law enforcement officer has access to body armor?

No. This program certainly ensures that more law enforcement officers will have access to soft body armor and I do believe that a majority of agencies in the United States provide or assist their officers in obtaining soft body armor. But I do not believe this or any Federally funded program could make absolutely sure that every law enforcement officer has a vest. It is my understanding that requests for funds have exceeded the available funds in every year of the BVP program's existence, which suggests that there are unmet needs out there.

—BUILDING ON A PROUD TRADITION—

Question #4:

How should the BVP program weigh the important balance between ensuring officers safety and maintaining high wear rates?

Higher wear rates obviously means a greater level of safety for the officers who are wearing them. I think that the best way to ensure greater wear rates among officers is to provide them with greater awareness and training with respect to the care of their soft body armor. I also strongly believe that law enforcement leaders—not just the chief or sheriff and his command staff, but FOP and other rank-and-file leaders need to lead by example. If your captain and your shop steward are wearing their vests, there is no excuse why every officer, barring special circumstances or a specific assignment, is not wearing his equipment during their shift.

Question #5:

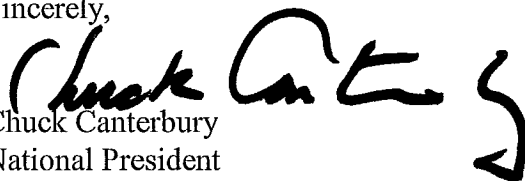
In your experience, what advances in body armor technology have increased “wearability,” and where are further advances needed to provide maximum protection to all law enforcement officers?

The reduced weight and breathability of the armor, all of which have been made possible by technological advancements, have greatly increased wearability. I should also add that the work of the National Institute of Justice and the Body Armor Safety Initiative has been stellar. As the FOP was the first law enforcement organization to bring our concerns about Zylon to the U.S. Department of Justice, we have been very happy with the responsiveness of NIJ and other components within Justice. Officer safety has been a real priority for them and we're grateful.

I also want to clarify one other matter, as it was raised during the hearing and again by Senator Coons in the submission of these questions for the record. A “mandatory wear policy” is required for any agency applying for BVP funds. The FOP supports a mandate that every law enforcement agency have a wear policy for their officers that sets down rules and guidelines for the officers employed by the agency. The wear policy should reflect the agency's commitment to officer safety and be guided by that objective, as well as common sense. But we feel strongly that the wear policy should be crafted by the agency, not by the BVP or Federal authority.

I want to thank you again for the opportunity to testify at this important hearing and am happy to provide you and the Committee with any additional information. Please feel free to contact me or Executive Director Pasco in my Washington office if I can be of any further assistance on this matter.

Sincerely,


Chuck Canterbury
National President