



CHUCK CANTERBURY
NATIONAL PRESIDENT

**NATIONAL
FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE®**

328 MASSACHUSETTS AVE., N.E.
WASHINGTON, DC 20002
PHONE 202-547-8189 • FAX 202-547-8190

JAMES O. PASCO, JR.
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

TESTIMONY

of

Chuck Canterbury

National President,

Grand Lodge, Fraternal Order of Police

on

**“Protecting Those Who Protect Us: The Bulletproof Vest
Partnership Grant Program”**

**before the
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate**

15 FEBRUARY 2012

— BUILDING ON A PROUD TRADITION —



Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Senator Grassley and the distinguished members of the Committee on the Judiciary. My name is Chuck Canterbury, National President of the Fraternal Order of Police, the largest law enforcement labor organization in the United States, representing more than 330,000 rank-and-file police officers in every region of the country.

I want to thank you, Mr. Chairman for inviting me here this morning to share the views of these rank-and-file officers about the Bulletproof Vest Partnership (BVP) grant program.

In 1998, Mr. Chairman, you and then-Senator Ben Nighthorse Campbell proposed a simple bill with a very simple goal--to increase the number of law enforcement officers wearing soft body armor by creating a program to provide matching Federal funds to State or local law enforcement agencies of any size seeking to purchase armor vests for use by their officers. The legislation was written to ensure agencies which did not provide their officers with soft body armor would be able to do so and gave priorities to those agencies where crime and violence are more prevalent. Additionally, agencies with outdated or ineffective body armor were given access to the grant, enabling them to upgrade their equipment and give maximum protection to their officers on the street.

There is no legislation, no government program, no grant or public-private partnership that can erase the sad fact that law enforcement officers will die. They will die in the line of duty at the hands of armed and violent criminals. But this program, Mr. Chairman, saves lives.

On 23 December 1975, Seattle Patrolman Raymond T. Johnson was shot. Fortunately, he was wearing soft body armor crafted through a partnership between the U.S. Departments of Defense and Justice and he survived. Since that shooting, the IACP-DuPont Survivors Club has certified 3,145 saves—that's 3,145 law enforcement officers who went home to their families and 3,145 names fewer on the Wall of Remembrance at Judiciary Square. How many other programs can quantify their success so starkly?

The 1970s were the deadliest decade for law enforcement officers, with more than 2,200 officers killed in the line of duty. But as soft body armor became more common, more affordable and more comfortable, it vastly improved the safety of law enforcement officers. Since 1970, firearms deaths are down 44%, and much of the credit goes to soft body armor.

This improvement is tempered by the events of last year, when 71 law enforcement officers were killed in the line of duty by firearms. Overall,

we lost 177 officers in the line of duty last year—the highest total since 2007. Of these slain heroes, 32% were not wearing their body armor when they died.

Soft body armor, you see, not only provides ballistic protection, but greatly increases the safety and survivability of other injuries from car crashes, physical fights, falls and other trauma. Over the past ten years, law enforcement officers are assaulted nearly 60,000 times in the course of a year, resulting in an average of more than 16,000 injuries each year. In many cases, soft body armor is a factor in the officer escaping the assault without injury or reducing the impact of that injury.

In many ways, body armor is the single most important and effective piece of equipment a law enforcement officer can possess.

Law enforcement officers are constantly in harm's way. They work out of their police vehicle and are expected to go forward into the unknown and, most of the time, are unsupported when they do. What these officers do in the critical opening moments of an incident will shape the outcome of that incident. These officers live or die with what they have at that moment. If their equipment is not adequate the outcome can be devastating. Their equipment must include soft body armor that is faithfully worn. Armor at the station or in the back of the scout car

provides no protection.

Yet, sadly, every year we lose officers in the line of duty who were not wearing their body armor. We cannot stress to our officers enough just how important it is to wear. As a father to police officer, I make sure my son knows how important it is.

To increase the percentage of law enforcement officers that are wearing vests, the BVP program now requires officers to have a mandatory wear policy in place. The FOP supports mandating that every agency have a policy about wearing soft body armor, but that the policy is best set by the agency in conjunction with their collective bargaining unit and the rank-and-file officer.

For instance, it may not be necessary to have a plain clothes detective in body armor when he is expected to be at his desk working a case.

Similarly, a chief or a sheriff in uniform on official business like appearing at a hearing or holding a press conference may not be required to wear body armor. But, generally speaking, the FOP supports efforts to increase the use of body armor by law enforcement.

In closing, Mr. Chairman I would like to say that support for State and local law enforcement through Federal grant programs has been

deteriorating in recent years. Programs like the Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance grant program and the hiring program administered by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services were once regarded as critical to maintaining the nation's historically low crime rates. Yet in this fiscal and political environment, these programs are dismissed as "local and State responsibilities." Members of Congress once held in high regard on "law and order" issues are now pushing deep and unsustainable cuts to these programs, at a time when law enforcement agencies are facing cuts in manpower and equipment at every level. This is not fiscal responsibility, it is irresponsible.

I think everyone here can see the value of the BVP grant program, and I sincerely hope that it will be reauthorized and not be held hostage by extraneous political disputes or find itself without any funds to disperse over procedural rules about authorization of Federal programs. This issue is too important. Officers are victimized enough by criminal assailants; they should not be put at increased risk due to a budgetary shortfall.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for holding this hearing, for inviting me to testify and, most importantly, having created and support the Bulletproof Vest Partnership grant program for all of these years.