

Good morning, Chairman Grassley. Thank you for this opportunity to testify before this Committee. My name is Jay Langenbau. I have been a certified Peace Officer for almost 20 years, and I have served as the Sheriff of Worth County in north central Iowa for the past 8 years. I live in Hanlontown, Iowa, a small town of about 150 people where I am also a volunteer Fire Fighter, as was my wife, Shelly Lair-Langenbau

Shelly was my best friend, and I got to marry her on August 19<sup>th</sup>, 2005. On March 7<sup>th</sup>, 2007, we had our first child, Liberty, and on April 12<sup>th</sup>, 2010 we had our second child, McKenna. But in addition to these dates, there is another date that I will never forget: January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013. On January 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013, my wife was working as a flight nurse on a Bell 407 helicopter for Mercy Hospital in Mason City, Iowa. Shortly before 9pm, they had gotten a call to transport a patient. Shortly after 9pm, the helicopter dispatch lost radio contact and 911 calls started coming in of a helicopter crash. My wife, mother of two beautiful girls and step mother of two sons, died en route to the transport.

Shortly after Shelley's death, I was told about the Public Safety Officers' Benefits program. So, I started filling out the application for the PSOB death benefit. I also contacted Mercy Hospital, local law enforcement and the National Transportation Safety Board (or NTSB) to get the information needed for the PSOB benefit application. By March 2013, after approximately one month of gathering materials, I had everything I needed, including a preliminary report from the NTSB. So, I contacted the Justice Department's PSOB office.

However, the PSOB office told me that they could not move forward with the application until they received the final report from the NTSB. It took 2 years for the NTSB

“Final Report” to come out, on February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2015. As a Sheriff and law enforcement officer, I fully understand the need to get the facts right, and I also understand that sometimes getting the facts right takes time. So, after having waited 2 long years for the NTSB report to come out, I allowed another 5 months to pass before contacting DOJ for a status update on July 2, 2015.

Much to my surprise, I learned that not only was my PSOB application still pending, but also that PSOB had only recently begun the process of verifying basic, clerical information that I had submitted two and half years ago – information like dates, Social Security numbers, and statements regarding Shelly’s relationship to her two stepsons. It seems to me like this type of information is something that DOJ could’ve checked on at the very beginning of the process when I first submitted the application, instead of waiting two and a half years. In any case, in an effort to help move the process along, I contacted Mercy Hospital myself to try to get the information that DOJ’s PSOB requested from them. Additionally, I worked on gathering additional statements as well as Social Security numbers that were requested by PSOB. All of that information was sent to PSOB within **two weeks**.

Three months later, on October 14<sup>th</sup>, 2015, I received an email from a Department of Justice PSOB official who advised me that the claim was finally assigned to a benefits specialist for review. I asked the official how long this stage would take. She advised it may be a few months before a determination is made and if there are no issues it should move rather quickly. She indicated that I may check back monthly for updates.

So, a month later, on November 17<sup>th</sup>, 2015, I checked back for an update. I was informed that DOJ needed **another** copy of the court documents regarding custody

arrangements for Shelly's step sons—even though I had already submitted these papers before. So, I emailed the document to them two days after it was requested. Since then, I have been checking in monthly with DOJ for status updates. My last communication with them was earlier this month, on April 4<sup>th</sup>, at which time DOJ informed me that nothing is needed at this time and thanked me for my continued patience.

Chairman Grassley and honorable members of this Committee – I am concerned about the time it takes for beneficiaries like me and my children to access PSOB benefits. I am also concerned that DOJ may be making applicants submit redundant papers and **wait unnecessarily**, by not even beginning the process of confirming basic clerical information, while it waits for findings from other agencies, like NSTB – as they did in my case.

Personally, my family and I have been graciously, humbly and patiently awaiting this benefit for over 3 years. Professionally, I know there is this great benefit for me, my fellow law enforcement officers, my fellow fire fighters, my fellow ambulance members, and all Emergency Services personnel. Knowing that is benefit is out there, helps to ease the stress and burdens of adjusting to a new life, especially in the first few months following a tragedy like the death of a loved one. This nation set up the PSOB benefit to help those in the emergency services profession. It would be helpful to for me to be able to tell colleagues that they can expect to receive assistance from the PSOB office within a few months rather than 3 plus years, in the event of a tragedy. Any assistance you can offer in expediting the process to receive this benefit would be greatly appreciated by me, my family, and others who have shared in similarly challenging experiences. Thank you for your time.