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**TESTIMONY OF CHIEF MICHAEL E. SCHIRLING
SENATE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY
PROTECTING THOSE WHO PROTECT US: THE BULLETPROOF VEST
PARTNERSHIP GRANT PROGRAM
FEBRUARY 15, 2012**

**TESTIMONY BY
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BURLINGTON POLICE DEPARTMENT
BURLINGTON, VERMONT**

Good Afternoon Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee.

My name is Michael Schirling and I have the privilege of serving as the Chief of Police in Burlington, VT. I am pleased to be with you again.

Burlington is a community of approximately 40,000, located on the eastern shores of Lake Champlain about 35 miles south of the Canadian border. We host, among other educational institutions, the University of Vermont and Champlain College. It is the central hub of activity, commerce, and services for northwestern Vermont, which encompasses a population of approximately 150,000 residents. We have a 145-year history of providing law enforcement services to Vermont's largest City with 100 officers and 36 civilian personnel.

Nationally, our 18,000 police departments and 800,000 police officers confront increasingly complex challenges on our streets and in our neighborhoods. 21st Century law enforcement stands squarely at the crossroads of every contemporary social issue. Each day in the United States, law enforcement officers are thrust into a myriad of situations in which, despite their best efforts and skill, they lack full control of events as they unfold and are seriously injured or killed. In the roughly 1 million encounters they have each day, officers face more complex and unpredictable scenarios. This results from a wide range of complicating factors including offenders released from our prisons, those with intractable substance abuse and addiction, and some in our communities with unmet mental health needs.

Last year was a tragic one for law enforcement in the United States. For the first time, the number of officers killed by gunfire exceeded the number killed in traffic crashes. The overall number of officers killed in the line of duty rose 37 percent in 2010 followed by a 16 percent increase in 2011. The nation's police chiefs are vividly aware that we must continually evaluate

and develop techniques that will protect our officers when confronted by those who will not hesitate to injure or even kill them. We owe this to those who put their lives on the line every day for the freedoms we cherish.

Among the most basic strategies is the use of bulletproof vests. My agency has mandated the wearing of vests for all uniformed personnel, and in October of 2011, the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) stated that they believe mandatory wear should be the standard for all agencies. As you are likely aware, the Attorney General has mandated that any agency receiving Bulletproof Vest Partnership funds must have a mandatory wear policy.

Vests are just one part of the equation. In 2002, the IACP Division of State Associations of Chiefs of Police created *SafeShield*, an initiative dedicated to protecting our nation's law enforcement officers and reducing the number of officers killed in the line of duty to ZERO. With the recent surge in violence against the police, there are two noteworthy projects underway:

First, in partnership with the Bureau of Justice Assistance (the U.S. Department of Justice, the Reducing Officer Injuries: Developing Policy Responses project), data has been collected for the period of July 2010 through June 2011, tracking daily injuries in 18 agencies. The data collected will allow IACP to make assessments and educate policy makers on what strategies and are needed to reduce injuries to officers.

The IACP is continuing to work on another important initiative: the National Center for the Prevention of Violence Against the Police. Funded by BJA, this Center is gathering comprehensive data from state, local, university and tribal law enforcement agencies in the United States on line-of-duty deaths and felonious assaults committed against law enforcement. Center staff will study this data to develop strategies across the criminal justice system designed to prevent violent assaults against law enforcement officers. In this vein of awareness and prevention, the Center recently released an agency self-assessment tool entitled: *Preventing Line of Duty Deaths: A Chief's Duty*. It is designed to help law enforcement leaders evaluate their agencies' efforts to address the safety needs of their officers.

I should also take a moment to touch on the health of our nation's police officers from a perspective beyond their physical safety. Faced with tragedy and stress repetitively during their careers we now recognize the support that is needed to maintain emotional and psychological health, and resiliency. With a suicide rate of 17 per 100,000 compared to 10 per 100,000 in the general population and 20 per 100,000 in the veteran population, we must also keep in mind the needs of our officers in this realm.

Federal, State, local, university and tribal law enforcement are doing all that we can to protect our communities from crime, disorder, and the specter of terrorism. I would be remiss if I did not take a moment to recognize the fiscal reality that faces our nation today. We must be smart about the projects and initiatives we choose to fund as our nation works hard to recover from a devastating recession. We must choose what we fund wisely. The safety of our nation's law enforcement officers is a wise and necessary investment. I urge you to reauthorize the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Act and continue to provide funds to help law enforcement agencies across the country purchase life-saving vests for their officers.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman and distinguished Senators, for taking testimony on this important issue, and for your continued leadership and assistance on criminal justice matters and the safety of our law enforcement officers, nationwide.