

# **TESTIMONY**

**Of**

**Lani Pinkney  
Retired Disabled Police Detective  
Metropolitan Police Department (MPD)**

**On**

**“The Long-term Care Needs of First Responders  
Injured in the Line of Duty”**

**Before the**

**Sub-Committee on Crime and Terrorism  
Senate Judiciary Committee  
United States Senate**

**January 17, 2018**

Good afternoon, Chairman Graham, Ranking Member Whitehouse and other distinguished members of the Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify before this Subcommittee on the issue of benefits, or lack of benefits, for First Responders who are severely injured in the line of duty. My name is Lani Pinkney and I was a Detective with the DC Metropolitan Police Department. I served on the force from 1987 – 1995.

On December 19, 1995, my partner and me were on regular patrol when we were flagged down by a citizen who reported a robbery in progress. We responded immediately to find two suspects trying to steal a car. After struggling with one of the suspects, other officers arrived to assist us. For reasons unknown, one of the officers responding to assist our efforts fired a shot which struck me in the back. The bullet struck between the T-11 and T-12 vertebra which makes up the central part of the spine. The bullet pierced my spinal sack. After a month in the hospital and a month at the National Rehabilitation Hospital I was released and told I would never walk again. I was pregnant with my third child when I was shot. Miraculously, my child survived and is aptly named “Precious Miracle Pinkney.”

At the time of the incident, I was an eight-year veteran of the DC Metropolitan Police Department. I joined the force in 1987 after graduating high school in Richmond, VA. I thoroughly enjoyed being a DC police officer. I quickly moving up through the ranks to special assignments in tactical units and in 1991, became a detective. I married in 1990 and gave birth to my son in 1992. My life was going well until that fateful day in 1995.

After the incident, the Department took care of my medical bills and I received a one-time payout of \$134,571.00 from the DoJ’s Public Safety Officers’ Benefits program (PSOB). In addition, I received \$3,719.56 in monthly retirement benefits from the Department. I did not receive any Social Security disability benefits and/or additional benefits. Unfortunately, these funds only went so far in paying my extensive healthcare bills and expenses.

With the reality hitting me that I would not walk again, my life spiraled into a very depressed state. In 1999, my marriage ended due in part to the

results of the incident. You see I was a decorated officer with a passion for the job. My colleagues at the department had given me the nickname "Action Jackson." Now confined to a wheelchair, my motivation for work and life was slowing disappearing. The hardest part of the journey was not being able to do the day to day activities with my children, that most of us take for granted. All they know is mommy in this chair.

After the incident, my only saving grace, was that the Department and City would be there to provide medical and financial support for me and my children. As the years past, I felt less and less confident in this assessment. I was assigned caseworkers through the Department and the City. Over time, it became an ordeal to work with the caseworkers to get financial assistance for medical and quality of life needs. At different times, I had doctors prescribe different items to improve my quality of life – installing a chairlift to get me up and down the stairs in my house was one. Most of the time, these requests were denied. It was always a battle to get anything. One of the worst situations was when I had requested assistance to fix my wheelchair wheel. It was denied. Shortly after that request, the wheel broke off of my wheelchair which caused me to fall and break my femur. As a result of that accident, I now have a rod and screws in my left leg.

In addition, the incident slowly destroyed my credit. Medical bills that the City was supposed to pay, were not paid on time and ultimately counted against my credit score.

At the end of the day, I have outlived the benefits and financial assistance that was provided to me in the wake of my injury. Though I did not pay the ultimate price, I feel that I have paid a significant price for serving my community as a law enforcement officer. I'm hear today to tell my story and the story of my fellow First Responders who have been severely injured in the line of duty and are unable to financially take care of ourselves and our families.

In closing, I would say the DoJ's PSOB funds and Department benefits certainly helped but after a few years, they were spent down quickly on medical bills and day to day living expenses. The unfortunate reality is

currently there are no financial aid programs that are available to help former First Responders, who have long-term costs associated with being severely injured in the line of duty.

Years ago, our nation made the decision to make sure that we take care of our military personnel severely injured in the line of duty and provide the necessary financial assistance to take care of their families. We need to do the same for those first responders who have and continue to make similar sacrifices.

I would also like to commend my old colleague's Dale Sutherland and Joe Abdalla at Code 3 for helping to bring attention to this important issue. I appreciate what they are doing at Code 3 to help improve the lives of those of us who have chosen to serve our communities as law enforcement officers.

Senators, I hope you and your colleagues, and the Trump Administration will consider modifying the current PSOB program or creating another program, that will help First Responders who have suffered significant injuries in the line of duty and will outlive the benefits that are currently available.

Members of the committee, thank you for allowing me to share my story today.