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**Hearing Before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary  
“The Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Program: Supporting Law Enforcement  
Officers When it Matters Most”**

**Presented on Wednesday, May 14, 2014**

Chairman Leahy, Ranking Member Grassley, and Members of the Committee: Good morning, and thank you for inviting me to testify regarding the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Program. As President of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), and on behalf of our over 22,000 members, I would like to thank the Committee for the support it has demonstrated over the years for the law enforcement field and our communities.

I began my career as a law enforcement officer with the City of Woodway, Texas in 1979. I am still there today and am currently the Chief and Director of the Public Safety Department. One of my main duties as Chief is to make sure my officers have the proper training and equipment they need to do their job safely, accurately, and efficiently so they can return home to their loved ones after their shift.

Body armor or bulletproof vests are critically important to a police officer’s survival and wellbeing. There’s no denying it, vests save lives, so it is imperative that all law enforcement officers are outfitted with properly fitted bulletproof vests. The Bulletproof Vest Partnership (BVP) Grant Program is a critical resource that enables state and local law enforcement jurisdictions to purchase these life saving vests. Since its enactment, this program has enabled over 13,000 state and local enforcement agencies to purchase over one million vests.

In Fiscal Year (FY) 2012, protective vests were directly attributable to saving the lives of at least 33 law enforcement and corrections officers, in 20 different states, an increase 13.7% over FY 2011. At least 14 of those life-saving vests had been purchased, in part, with BVP funds. In fact, thanks to BVP my department has been able to purchase 72 vests, with matching funds, since 2000. The BVP program has enabled us to fully outfit every officer in my department with this life saving body armor.

It is not just my responsibility as a Chief and a law enforcement executive to ensure that the officers of my department each have a bulletproof vest and the equipment and training they need to ensure their wellbeing and safeguard the community. Officer safety is an all-hands task, and also the responsibility of the government, as well as government leaders, to ensure the safety and well-being of its citizens and the lives of the officers who have dedicated their lives to protecting their communities. In order to fulfill our duties and responsibilities as law enforcement officers in protecting our communities we must first protect ourselves, and access to body armor through the BVP Grant Program is a critical component.

Sadly, and perhaps surprisingly to many, a number of American law enforcement officers do not have body armor available to them on a routine basis or it is not completely up to date. This is in part attributable to the shrinking budgets of state and local governments and their law enforcement agencies. That is why it is imperative that the reauthorization of funds for BVP occur. State and local law enforcement jurisdictions depend on this program to help purchase or partially purchase protective body armor for their officers.

To give you a sense of how important this program is to law enforcement, in FY 2013 the BVP program received a total of 4,580 applications from small jurisdictions alone, which are characterized as having a population of under 100,000 under this program. Funding small jurisdictions under the BVP grant program is a program priority requirement. This meant that in FY 2013 none of the 502 large jurisdictions applicants (populations of over 100,000) were awarded funding in FY 2013. In addition to not having enough funds in FY 2013 to provide

awards to any of the large jurisdiction applicants, there were insufficient funds to provide even the maximum 50% to all small jurisdiction applicants. Small jurisdictions that applied received only 37.10% of the amount they requested on their applications.

Officer safety and wellness has always been the IACP's top priority. It is the position of the organization that no injury to or death of a law enforcement professional is acceptable. A key element to officer safety is the use of bulletproof vests. That is why the IACP has developed a model policy in 1999 for the purpose of providing law enforcement officers with guidelines for the proper use and care of body armor. In addition, the IACP adopted a resolution for mandatory vest use in 2011. The resolution calls for all law enforcement executives to immediately develop and implement a mandatory body armor wear policy for their departments.

In addition, the IACP partnered with DuPont in 1987 to create the IACP/Dupont Kevlar Survivors' Club. The mission of the Survivors' Club is to reduce death and disability by encouraging increased wearing of personal body armor. The Survivors' Club also recognizes and honors those deserving individuals who, as a result of wearing personal body armor, have survived a life-threatening or life-disabling incident.

Since its inception, there have been 3,180 verified saves documented by the Survivors' Club thanks to body armor. I don't have enough time to detail every incident, but I would like to call out a few.

- Just this past Friday (May 9, 2014) in Killeen, TX, officers serving a narcotics search warrant came under fire. Two officers were hit by gunfire, but were spared injury thanks to their protective gear.
- In Texas, Muleshoe Police Sergeant Steven Bartley was shot on February 10, 2012. His department purchased vests through the Bulletproof Vest Partnership. This vest saved his life.

- In Arizona, Prescott Police Sergeant Kevin Perlak was shot on January 22, 2008. He was saved by his vest.
- On December 2, 2011, a police officer from a small town in southern New York was shot. He continues to serve his community to this day thanks to the vest his department purchased for him through BVP.
- A North Charleston, South Carolina, Police Officer David Winslette was shot on January 14, 2012. His department purchased vests through the Bulletproof Vest Partnership. The vest saved his life.
- In Illinois, a Burbank Police Officer Jesse Collatta was shot on February 18, 2008. His department purchased vests through the Bulletproof Vest Partnership. He too was saved by his vest.
- Police Reserve Officer Sammy Lawrimore from Somerville, Alabama, was shot on October 23, 2004. He was saved by his vest.
- In California, Sacramento Police Officer Kelli Maness was shot on December 7, 2008. She was saved by her vest.

It is important to note that vests do not just protect against assaults with firearms.

- Minneapolis, Minnesota, Police Officer James Huber was stabbed on August 12, 2012. He was saved by his vest.
- In Utah, Iron County Deputy Richard Dickinson was assaulted with a motor vehicle on November 29, 2007. He was saved by the vest he was wearing, which was purchased by BVP funds.
- Des Moines, Iowa, Police Superintendent Colonel Patrick Hoyer was involved in a motor vehicle crash on March 15, 2008. He was saved by his vest.

I think this helps demonstrate how vests save the lives of officers all across the country. These officers, and the thousands of other officers, were able to return home to their family, friends, and loved ones thanks to their live-saving bulletproof vests.

What many people don't realize is broad reaching effects from when an officer is killed or even wounded. Not only does the officer suffer, but so do the officer's family, friends and police colleagues. The death of a law enforcement officer has a shocking impact upon the agency and the community as a whole. The unique effects can range from reduced productivity and low morale among officers to public fearfulness and sorrow. There is also the potential for strained relations between the community and the law enforcement agency.

In addition to the human costs, there are financial and operational costs to consider. The U.S. Department of Justice – Bureau of Justice Assistance - Public Safety Officers Benefits Program, provides \$323,035 in death and education benefits to survivors of fallen law enforcement officers. The average cost of a bulletproof vest is \$800 to \$1,000. That's roughly 323 vests that could be purchased with money saved, if more departments had assistance in purchasing vests for their officers.

The loss of one officer in a small agency can have a crippling effect upon manpower and the agency's ability to deliver services, not to mention the devastating blow that it inevitably has on fellow officers, friends and colleagues. While larger agencies are less vulnerable to manpower disruptions, they too experience devastating emotional blows that can disrupt operations and services.

The death or injury of an officer creates a wide variety of unanticipated and very costly expenditures for the agency. Possible expenditures include medical bills; funeral expenses; workman's compensation and death benefit payments; increased insurance premiums; sick leave; retirement system costs; legal fees; civil judgments; replacement and retraining expenses; and overtime pay. Viewed solely in a financial light, the effects of an officer's death can have significant consequences.

According to the IACP's Reducing Officer Injuries Report, those individuals who reported wearing body armor missed fewer work days after an injury and endured fewer rehabilitation days compared to those who were not wearing armor during their injury. This data covers felonious assaults, motor vehicle accidents, and other incidents.

On behalf of the IACP and the Woodway Police Department, I cannot stress the importance of bulletproof vests enough and the ability of law enforcement agencies to fully equip their officers with this life-saving body armor.

Thank you again for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the importance of the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Program. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.