



**NATIONAL  
FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE®**

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328 MASSACHUSETTS AVE., N.E.  
WASHINGTON, DC 20002  
PHONE 202-547-8189 • FAX 615-202-547-8190

**CHUCK CANTERBURY**  
NATIONAL PRESIDENT

**JAMES O. PASCO, JR.**  
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**TESTIMONY**

of

**Chuck Canterbury**

**National President,**

**Grand Lodge, Fraternal Order of Police**

on

**“The Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Program:  
Supporting Law Enforcement Officers When it Matters  
Most”**

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

**14 MAY 2014**

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 and to urge the Senate to act on your bill, S. 933, to reauthorize this critically important program.

Say what you will about government waste, redundant programs and Federal funds being used on useless, pork-barrel products. The BVP program saves lives. Each and every year, there are law enforcement officers who are alive today because they were wearing soft body armor which was purchased using funds from this program. How many other programs can quantify their success so starkly?

In 1998, Senator Leahy 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 that agencies which did not provide their officers with soft body armor would be able to do so and gave priority to those agencies where crime and violence are more prevalent. Additionally, agencies with outdated or ineffective body armor were given access to the program, enabling them to upgrade their equipment and give maximum protection to their officers on the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. But this program 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 DuPont Survivor's Club has certified more than 3,100 saves. That is 3,100 law enforcement officers who went home to their families and 3,100 fewer names on the Wall of Remembrance at Judiciary Square here in Washington, D.C. This program has saved lives. We know that it has.

One hundred and five law enforcement officers have been killed in the line of duty this year. Thirty-one were shot and killed. While we know that there is no way to end the deadly risks inherent to a career in law enforcement, we must do everything possible to ensure that officers who put their lives on the line every day also put on a vest. Body armor is one of the most important pieces of equipment an officer can have and often means the difference between life and death. For more than a decade, this program has increased the quality and number of armored vests available to our nation's law enforcement officers.

And while soft body armor is specifically designed to provide ballistic protection, it also greatly increases survivability of other injuries—car crashes, physical fights, falls and other trauma. On average, our nation's law enforcement officers suffer about 60,000 assaults in a year, resulting in an average of 16,000 injuries. 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. At the moment a critical incident unfolds, these officers' lives depend on the equipment they have at hand. If their equipment is not adequate, the outcome can be devastating. Every law enforcement officer should be provided with soft body armor and every officer should be wearing that vest whenever they are out on the street.

I make this statement not only as the National President of the FOP or a retired police officer. I also make it as a father. My son is an active duty officer. His safety is at risk on every shift and I've made it very clear to him how important it is for him to be wearing his vest.

In closing, I would like to thank Senator Leahy, the original author of this legislation. Mr. Chairman, this bill has saved lives. That is a fact. There are officers who are with their families and still on patrol today because of this program and, on their behalf, I thank you. Chairman Leahy has been unwavering in his support of this program and for State and local law enforcement. Support for State and local law enforcement programs has been deteriorating in recent years, but Chairman Leahy has been one of our most reliable and effective champions. We are deeply grateful for his help and his leadership.

Thank you. I would now be pleased to answer any questions you might have.