

Statement of Terri O'Connor

My name is Terri O'Connor. As you just heard from my short bio, my husband, Jim, was a Philadelphia Police Officer. Jim was a Corporal in Swat who was shot and killed in the line of duty on March 13, 2020. Jim's death will never seem real, he served the police department for 23 years, His father was also a Philadelphia Police Officer, serving for over 40 years. Our son, and daughter-in-law, are both currently, Philadelphia police officers. Our police family extends to numerous other family members, too. This is the one job we all know too well. I, myself, started out as a police dispatcher. I had first-hand experience of hectic situations, and numerous emergencies. My job was to keep a cool voice and calmness to whatever situation needed to be dealt with. Our goal was to have every officer go home at the end of each shift.

Defunding the police is dangerous. Look at what has happened in cities like Seattle and Portland -- and in so many large cities across the country -- murders are up and there is a sense especially among criminals that there is no law and order on the streets. The mayor and city council have accepted zero accountability. This brings me to Philadelphia, where we had one of our highest murder rates in decades last year. 500 murders were committed in 2020, and more than 2,400 shootings including 225 women and 195 children. This year, we're already on pace for an even higher murder rate. Four months in the year and we have over 145 murders, 440 shootings, and 55 of those shooting victims were children. Philadelphia is a prime example of what happens when police are demoralized and feel the pressure of a no consequences DA like Larry Krasner along with the narrative that often goes along with the defund the police rhetoric that all cops are bad. My son has told me that while locking criminals up, they laugh and say that they'll be out of jail in a day or two. The criminals know there are no real consequences here in Philadelphia.

My husband's four murderers had rap sheets that could go on for days. Including multiple violations of probation, drug chargers, and gun charges. They all had reduced bail, and cases dropped. The man who pulled the actual trigger has five murders under him, including my husband. And those were the ones they've only learned about so far. One of the other males in the room was wanted for 2 prior murders. The other males both had previous gun charges. They were holed up in a tiny, rented, one bedroom apartment, with nine guns lined up, and multiple drugs throughout the room. Who do you think should be responsible for going into the room and responding to incidents involving hardened criminals like this? Mental health workers, maybe a negotiator? This is the job my husband, and his coworkers signed up for. There are split second decisions that need to be made.

Nobody hates a bad cop more than a good cop, but the movement to defund the police is now about demonizing every officer and taking our country into anarchy by abolishing

the police altogether. Every officer is giving at least 9 months of training before entering the academy. They then have continued yearly training. Swat officers alone, have an extra three months of training before they can serve warrants, handle a barricaded situation, etc. The morning of March 13th, they used some of their training and used restraint, when fired upon, to return fire, but stop and negotiate through a closed door. The criminals asked them to stop shooting, and the police responded for them to do the same. Four other males could have been killed that day. The police used their training to not make the situation even worse. All our officers could use high risk training. They sometimes have a split second to make a decision.

Defunding the police reduces funding for vitally important training and ongoing professional development that needs to occur to address bad policing tactics. Police brutality usually occurs when overly aggressive policing tactics are implemented in dramatic fashion, or with evil intent. To reduce this type of violence, we should reevaluate policing tactics and make sure our police are trained in the most effective de-escalation skills and techniques possible. Good policing requires a commitment to robust training that must be ongoing. This requires funding.

A recent shooting in Philadelphia reflects the continued need for money and training. Walter Wallace, was a knife-wielding, mentally ill man, was shot when he aggressively approached police. Although, I do not believe there was enough time for a mental health worker to be called in on this type of job, if a taser was used, he could have been subdued until he was taken to the proper facility. But the officers were not equipped with tasers. More than half of Philadelphia officers don't carry the recommended tasers. Funding is an issue. There are many reforms that we can debate, however, defunding the police is not one of them.

To think that criminals are victims of society and the system is totally absurd. There needs to be a respect level for our police officers. We need stricter penalties. We hear too many times that a criminal has a lengthy list of prior arrests, but is out of jail because of reduced bail, or convictions overturned and thrown out of jail. Our DA, and others need to be held accountable for letting these people out of jail.

I know, personally, that Jim's murderers still should have been locked up. If they had been kept in jail, where they deserved to be, I wouldn't be spending today, April 22, my 26th Wedding Anniversary, testifying on his behalf at this congressional hearing. Jim should be here, his life mattered.