

Statement of Public Safety Officer Zachary Allen Andersen
Cedar Falls, Iowa
Hearing on
“Law Enforcement Officer Safety: Protecting Those Who Protect and Serve”
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Tuesday, July 26, 2022

Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Grassley, and distinguished members of the panel, thank you for providing me an opportunity to speak to you today. My name is Zach Andersen, I am a Public Safety Officer with the City of Cedar Falls in Iowa. I want to share with you today about a recent experience of mine, that unfortunately is not dissimilar of too many of my brothers and sisters in law enforcement.

On April 9th 2021 I was working with my former agency as a Sheriff’s Deputy in Grundy County Iowa. My evening started off like many had before with a few normal calls and traffic stops. Then as I stopped for dinner, I heard a call come out that an officer was in a pursuit. The situation worsened as I learned the officer involved had been assaulted and I quickly responded in that direction. The suspect fled to his residence in the city of Grundy Center and was followed there by a fellow Sheriff’s Deputy. I arrived on scene shortly after they had and the suspect had barricaded himself in his residence. Many additional officers arrived on scene and countless attempts were made at all entrances of his home to call him out, saying “We don’t want to hurt you”, “Come out with your hands up.” Unfortunately, all of these attempts were met with no response. We did not know if the suspect was alive, awake or ok.

The responding agencies on scene met and formulated a plan for entry into the home, leading that plan was Sergeant Jim Smith, a leader with the Iowa State Patrol Tactical Team. It was decided to first send in a K9 to clear the basement of the residence. That was completed and officers began knocking and announcing the impending entry of the K9 to the main level of the home. The suspect ambushed us when the next door was opened. He was waiting for us with a shotgun. He fired two shots, striking and killing Sergeant Jim Smith. The suspect then retreated back into his home. Shouts of “Jim, Jim” is what I recall hearing Trooper Matt Lively calling out as he tried to provide care for

Sergeant Smith and then remove him from the garage. Two officers were trapped in the basement, and the suspect began making threats to kill us all. “Come in and start shooting”, “I’ll kill you like I killed your buddy”, “I was nice, I shot him in the chest, but come sunup I won’t be so nice, I’ll shoot you in the face”.

The words I heard and events I witnessed with be with me the rest of my life. Not a day goes by it doesn’t cross my mind. Today I can tell you that I’m doing ok, but I know there are others that are not. Action needs to be taken to protect those of us in this line of work. We need to have the right support and resources opposing ‘defund the police’. The image of an officer has been tarnished in recent years. We are consistently being scrutinized, ridiculed, and disrespected. The rhetoric used by the media does us no favors with clickbait headlines of what an officer did or did not do, without painting the rest of the picture. Radicalization in posts and articles online, even within politicians; it’s absurd to think the public doesn’t absorb this demonization of law enforcement and that there is no correlation of how we are then treated. We take an oath to do our best for the communities we protect given the training we have received, and the men and women I have had the opportunity to work with stand behind that promise daily. The suspect in the tragedy I was involved in ramped up his hatred of law enforcement and got much worse as the way of the world got worse. He had a goal that day, one that he succeed in achieving.

I did question if I wanted to continue in this field as a direct result of this incident. Is it worth the risk? What is being done to support us after a major incident like this? We need to prioritize resources for officers; people to talk to, time off, debriefings, trainings. Not all officers will seek the help they need, so there needs to be steps in place so officers don’t fall through the cracks and not get help. I’m grateful my wife encouraged me to talk, but not everyone has that same support, or will open up to even those closest to them. Events like this take a toll on our families as well and they also need to be supported. My wife knew that night I was supposed to be home soon but had been called to an emergency. Being from a small community word travels fast, she had heard an officer was shot and killed and had not heard from me. She knew where the incident was taking place, and my GPS from my phone put me right there, but I hadn’t moved for hours. She sat for a long time that night in the unknown. She has since struggled with survivors’ guilt because with the relief of knowing

I was ok and coming home came the harsh reality that that wasn't the case for another Iowa family.

On April 9th 2021, Kathy Smith lost her husband, Zander and Jazlyn lost their father and the law enforcement family lost a brother. Sergeant Smith made the ultimate sacrifice. And from all I've learned about him and the leader he was, he wouldn't have had it any other way, but to be sent first and protect his men. I ask you today to lead like Jim would – by defending us, protecting us, caring for us, and validating the work we do. As law-enforcement officers we talk about holding the line, the thin blue line. Serving and protecting those in need. We need our families, our friends, our communities and our nation's leaders to have our back as we fight to hold that line. Because without that support, the line cannot be held.

Thank you.