



**Statement of Angel Novalez
Chief of Constitutional Policing and Reform
Chicago Police Department**

before the

U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary

Hearing on “Law Enforcement Officer Safety: Protecting Those Who Protect and Serve”

July 26, 2022

Good morning, Chairman Durbin, Ranking Member Grassley, and Committee members. My name is Angel Novalez and I serve as the Chief of Constitutional Policing and Reform for the Chicago Police Department. Thank you for holding this hearing. I am honored to represent the Chicago Police Department, and to speak on behalf of those who often feel unheard. Those sons, daughters, mothers, and fathers behind the badge, risking their lives every day to protect our communities.

Policing is a very dangerous job. And while it is our job to protect our communities, we cannot underestimate the emotional toll it has on our officers. We’re the ones responding to victims, processing crime scenes, taking those images home with us, and putting the uniform back on the next day. Those experiences stay with us forever, bearing an impact words can never express. Not every officer is physically injured in a violent encounter, but every officer endures the emotional scars of repeated exposure to violence.

And this is one of the toughest times to wear the badge. This year alone, Chicago Police Officers have been shot at 36 times, with seven of those struck by gunfire. In the last two and a half years, our officers have taken more than 24,000 guns off the streets of Chicago.

I am joined today by my fellow officers, including Deputy Chief Patrina Wines, who last year was shot in the line of duty. I am also joined by Ms. Elizabeth French, the mother of our fallen hero, Officer Ella Grace French. Almost one year ago today, Officer French and her partner, Officer Carlos Yanez Jr., were shot in the line of duty. Officer French lost her life to the wounds she sustained, and each day Officer Yanez and his family continue to heal from, and adapt to, his catastrophic and lasting injuries. Officer Joshua Blas, Ella's partner and friend, sprang into action and helped to save Officer Yanez's life. Although Joshua did not sustain a gunshot wound, the emotional toll he will have to endure from that incident cannot be overstated.

These are the moments we know can happen, but we hope never happen.

Ella was a source of light and joy to all who knew her. Her partner Carlos remarked she was beautiful, inside and out. She loved animals and lived to help others. Her friends say her bubbly spirit was a constant, no matter the situation. Carlos comes from a police family and his colleagues have always admired his determination. In fact, when his doctor told him he'd never be able to use the left side of his body, Carlos said, "I accept the challenge." He danced with his wife in March of this year. Carlos continues to recover with his family and remains a source of inspiration for our Department.

Early in my career, my partner and I were responding to a call of a woman crying for help, we encountered an offender with a drawn gun. I ordered him to drop the weapon. He lowered his weapon as if he was about to drop it, when suddenly he turned and fired off a round in my direction. I still remember the look on his face before he fired. I felt the round before I heard the shot. I thought my vest had absorbed the bullet. What I didn't realize was the bullet pierced the side of my chest and traveled and collapsed my lungs. I radioed my location, and later learned I had inadvertently radioed my mother's home address. The injuries sustained from this event remain with me today professionally, physically, and in the private corners of my mind.

I still struggle from my wounds, as many officers around the country are struggling from the injuries they have sustained and the traumatic human experiences they witness every single day on the job. They do this while trying to balance the realities of this noble profession with their everyday lives. You can't exaggerate the impact that our experiences with crime and violence have on us.

Protecting those who protect us has to be a priority. I can't help but think about Officer French and all the officers whose families have been left without them. I think about Ms. French when she shared how Ella became a police officer to make communities safer and her response to today's hearing saying, quote, "It was important to Ella Grace to get as many weapons off the street as possible. Her death and that of so many other innocent people are why we must keep working to get guns off the streets. It's a piece of the puzzle and the reason that I'm willing to be here is to help something good come out of the death of my dear Ella Grace French," end quote.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you here today.