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of

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at the

Oversight Hearing on Police Practices

before the House Committee on the Judiciary

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--BUILDING ON A PROUD TRADITION--

Good morning, Chairman Nadler, Ranking Member Collins and the distinguished members of this Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to speak for the nearly 350,000 members of the Fraternal Order of Police.

My name is Patrick Yoes and just over a month ago, I was elected as the National President of the FOP. We are the nation's oldest and largest law enforcement labor organization. My profession is evolving—some of these changes are driven by technology, others by society and, of course, by our own internal efforts to improve the public safety services we provide to our communities.

I am here today to let you know that the FOP stands ready to work with anyone, speak with anyone and cooperate with anyone who genuinely wants to work collectively to help improve policing in our country.

As a law enforcement officer, I have spent my 35-year career answering calls for help. Today, I am making a call to help—my profession is facing many challenges and we cannot overcome them alone.

Law enforcement officers were once universally respected. Parents would tell their children, “If you need help, find a police officer.” I suspect that this may no longer be true in every case and this both saddens and troubles me. Now, law enforcement officers are often viewed with suspicion and disdain, which, in far too many cases, has escalated into physical hostility.

Early this summer, in Sacramento, California, a gunman ambushed two deputies responding to a domestic violence call and shot 27-year old Tara O’Sullivan. Her fellow officers raced to the scene and, while actively engaged in a gun battle, bystanders—the very public they were there to protect—were berating and mocking the officers during this incident while one of their own lay injured and still in the line of fire. It took 45 minutes to rescue the deputy who died at the hospital from her injuries.

Last month in Philadelphia, officers serving a warrant were suddenly fired upon by a gunman. The shooter trapped two officers in the building and shot a total of six officers. It was a miracle that none of

those officers were killed that day. While responding officers were actively engaged in this active shooter situation, they were verbally harassed by the local community members and had to seek cover from not just the shooter, but from the community members hurling objects at them. The very next day there was a rally in Philadelphia, not in support of the injured heroes of the city's police department, but in support of the man who tried to kill them.

These are just two examples of the many in the last three months alone where the very public we serve has aggressively demonstrated active hostility towards law enforcement when they were simply doing their jobs and keeping their communities safe. Some days it seems the world is completely upside down.

These shameful acts are an example of the harm being done by the changes in our attitudes toward police officers. It seems we have moved from a lack of support and respect for our police officers to outright animosity. We are public servants, not public enemies, and yet ambush attacks on law

enforcement have been increasing for the last eight years. A recent study by the FBI concluded that in many cases these attacks were motivated by a desire to hurt or kill a police officer.

So far this year, 219 officers were shot and 35 officers were killed in the line of duty. Thanks to advances in anti-ballistic armor and trauma medicine, the majority of our officers are surviving these attacks, but Congress needs to act to reduce this type of targeted violence by once again passing H.R. 1325, the “Protect and Serve Act,” introduced by Representatives Rutherford and Demings, the latter of whom is a member of this Committee. Chief Demings, thank you for your service, for your steadfast support for our noble profession and for supporting this important legislation.

This bill would make it a Federal offense to target a law enforcement officer with violence in certain, limited circumstances. It would not make every attack against an officer a Federal crime, but it would give the U.S. Department of Justice a tool to fight back against targeted attacks on police like those in Dallas and Baton Rouge in my home State.

Last year, this committee passed this legislation unanimously and, during National Police Week, when we honored 128 officers who gave their lives for the public they swore an oath to serve, it was approved by the House by an overwhelming vote of 382-35. I urge the Committee to pass this legislation again and demonstrate in this very real way that Congress supports the men and women in law enforcement, because right now, they feel completely abandoned.

The changing attitudes toward law enforcement are not just endangering the men and women in law enforcement—they are triggering escalations in normal, everyday police-community interactions. On any given day in America, there are over 2 million police/public interactions. When we interact with a member of the community who refuses to comply with the officer's directions, perhaps because of their perspective of police, the situation escalates.

We in law enforcement are pushing for more focus on de-escalation strategies, but we are encountering

increased belligerence and uncooperativeness in some situations. This increases the risk of physical harm to the members of the community, the officer and innocent bystanders. It must stop—people must comply with an officer’s reasonable directions. We expect our officers to adhere to certain policies and protocols when answering a call for service or interacting with the public and we need—we depend upon—the cooperation of the citizens we protect.

These changing attitudes are also having an impact on the ability of my profession to retain and recruit the very best and brightest. Ours is a difficult and dangerous profession. It doesn’t always pay well, which is not always appealing to young college graduates with tuition debt.

When law enforcement officers are disparaged and disrespected by the people they protect—the very people for whom officers put themselves in harm’s way—it is difficult to make a good case as to why our nation’s best and brightest should take up the call of public service and join the noble profession of law enforcement.

As law enforcement officers, we are the chief face of local government and are the most likely public servant to have regular contact with the communities we serve. Law enforcement officers are entrusted with significant authority and are expected to wield that authority with discretion and integrity.

Our actions are subject to intense scrutiny and we are ready to withstand that scrutiny, provided that all of the facts are reviewed and due process has been followed.

Unfortunately, sometimes elected officials, media outlets and the public are too quick to condemn police actions without knowing all of the facts and affording the officers due process. This lack of support, especially from our own leadership, is wrong and demoralizing to the rank-and-file.

Negative media coverage and lack of support from police executives and the community are certainly impacting our efforts to retain and recruit men and women to a career in law enforcement. We are seeing that in the decreased number of applications to join a law enforcement agency. A report from the

end of last year showed that applicants decreased by 66%. There are also less officers in the field today than there were 20 years ago and far too many agencies are short-staffed.

My profession is also working to improve itself. We have stepped up to the plate and engaged with many of the organizations represented here today on issues like body cameras to improve law enforcement transparency, while still protecting our right to privacy. I believe the FOP provided testimony at each and every public meeting of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing. We support the majority of that body's findings and have worked with Members of this Committee to implement many of them.

We engaged with the Administration and many of the groups represented here to support the historic First Step Act—the largest and most comprehensive overhaul of the Federal criminal justice system in recent history. While many of our fellow law enforcement organizations chose to withhold support or even oppose this legislation, the FOP was able to support it because we stayed at the table—we were

engaged in constructive dialogue. We did so because we have a genuine commitment to improve, not just our profession, but the criminal justice system as a whole. I think everyone should be proud of the result, in part, because we achieved it *together*.

Another issue on which there is bipartisan support is addressing the issues of mental health and wellness among the men and women in law enforcement.

Being a police officer is not easy and our job description has expanded to include the role of therapist, marriage counselor, addiction specialist, and spiritual advisor. Police officers see the very worst of humanity, with some statistics suggesting that a police officer will experience more traumatic events in six months than the average person will experience in a lifetime.

All of this can make an officer feel like the weight of the world is on his or her shoulders and this takes a tremendous toll on their physical and mental well-being. One in every five officers is subject to Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) which can lead to

deterioration of heart arterial health, hormonal imbalances and depression leading to suicide.

Consider this: the average life expectancy for an American is 78.7 years. The average life expectancy of a police officer is ten years less. First responders are five times more likely to experience PTSD and depression than civilians, and the number of suicides among law enforcement officers seems to be grossly under reported. In 2017, 140 police officers took their own lives. In contrast, 46 officers died after being fatally shot in the line of duty that same year—nearly 67% less than the number of suicides.

Who do officers turn to when they are overcome by stress? Good question! There must be more awareness and better access to mental health services. Police officers run towards danger when most people run away and I believe agencies should be running towards us with support, understanding and the tools to help us cope with our stress in a healthier way.

Police officers are human beings and our work deeply impacts our relationships, our quality of life

and our mental health. Historically, people who suffer from PTSD are in a dark place and, too often, agencies are quick to act against them rather than working with them, or with organizations like the FOP, to address the root causes of these issues. Rather than cast them aside, it is our moral and fiduciary responsibility to fix that which is broken in the service of others.

In the previous Congress, we worked together to pass the Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act. This Administration, working through the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), has been a terrific partner on this issue. More recently, Congress passed and the President signed into law, the Supporting and Treating Officers in Crisis, or STOIC, Act. This will revive and expand programs for officers and their families with stress reduction, suicide prevention and general mental health and wellness. We look forward to working with our friends in the COPS office on these issues as well.

I would also suggest that this Committee consider H.R. 3735, the “Law Enforcement Suicide Data

Collection Act,” so that we can get a better understanding of the challenges we face in addressing the issue of officer suicide. We are grateful to Representative Quigley and to Judiciary Committee Members Dean and Steube for introducing this legislation.

Finally, my profession will continue to work hard to build and maintain the trust and respect of the communities we protect. We cannot do it alone, but it must be done and the FOP, I promise you, will do its part.

We are committed to doing this and, as I said at the start of my testimony—we will engage with anyone at any time if they have a sincere desire to improve policing in our nation. Not only does the safety of our officers and their ability to protect the citizens of their community depend on this; working together to improve policing in our nation is critical to preserving our country and the American way of life.

I thank you all again for this opportunity and would be pleased to answer any further questions.