



FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE

Testimony of
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on Law Enforcement Officer Safety:
Protecting Those Who Protect and Serve
before the Senate Committee on the Judiciary



Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Grassley, and all the distinguished members of this Committee, I want to thank you for accepting this testimony for the record, which is offered on behalf of the 364,000 members of the National Fraternal Order of Police.

My name is Patrick Yoes, the National President of the Fraternal Order of Police, our nation's oldest and largest law enforcement labor organization.

We thank the Committee for having this hearing to discuss the issue of violence and threats of violence targeting law enforcement officers. This hearing has been a long time coming and has been discussed for the past several Congresses. I am pleased that this issue is finally getting the attention it deserves and disappointed I could not join you in person.

This past year has been one of the most dangerous years for law enforcement in recent history due to the increase of violence directed toward law enforcement officers, the nationwide crime crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Frankly, it is unlike anything I've seen in my 36 years of law enforcement. Last year we saw more officers shot in the line of duty than any other since the National Fraternal Order of Police began recording this data in late 2015. At that time, there was no government entity or other organization compiling this information, but the FOP understood the value of having this data and began tracking and recording the number of officers who were shot in the line of duty. To the extent that we were able, we worked to identify which incidents were ambushes because the FOP views these attacks as the most dangerous and deadly.

In 2018, the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), under the auspices of the National Blue Alert Program, also began tracking this data. Just two years ago, the FOP received an award from the COPS Office which allowed us to enhance our ability to collect this data, expand the number of data points we collect, and provide better analysis—particularly with respect to the nature of the shooting incidents.

In 2021, a historic 346 law enforcement officers were shot in the line of duty; 64 of those brave men and women were killed. To make matters worse, there were 133 officers shot in 107 separate ambush-style attacks.

I'm sad to report that so far this year, we are outpacing last year's historic number of officers shot and killed. This fact is disturbing and should alarm all Americans. As of 25 July, there have been 203 officers shot in the line of duty, 38 of whom were killed.

When people look at this data, they often just see numbers. But we must remember that these are real people we are talking about—fathers, mothers, sons, and daughters. They are heroes who suit up and show up every day to serve and protect the communities they love.

These grim numbers would be even worse, were it not for significant advancements in medical trauma science and anti-ballistic technology. Officers who are shot in the line of

duty have a better chance of surviving the incident, but the number of attacks on officers continues to increase.

Every felonious attack on a law enforcement officer, especially by gunfire, is disturbing regardless of the circumstances. Officers are in the line of fire and must always be vigilant and maintain the highest level of situational awareness. In most response scenarios, officers can quickly assess situations, recognize threats, and take adequate defensive actions. Tragically, not every threat can be seen or mitigated. The most troubling and dangerous incidents are ambush-style and other calculated attacks on law enforcement. Based on the guidelines set by the COPS Office—which defines "ambush-style attack" as when an officer is struck by gunfire without any warning or opportunity to defend themselves—our data shows the number of ambush-style attacks in 2021 increased by 115% from the previous year. So far this year 68 were shot in 43 separate ambush-style attacks. This should alarm all Americans.

A 2017 [report](#) from the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) identified a disturbing and growing trend of attackers who are motivated by a desire to kill a law enforcement officer. This motivation, the report concludes, is from a "singular narrative that portrays the officer as guilty in traditional and social media and the subject as the victim." Fourteen of the 50 assailants—28%—that participated in this study expressed a desire to kill law enforcement officers. This is a frightening statement.

A December 2017 [study](#) by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), which examined law enforcement officer fatalities from 2010-2016, found that 20% of ambushed officers were seated in their patrol cars and 56% of officers killed in an ambush were not on a call or engaged in any enforcement activity. Many of these officers were simply eating, sitting a post, or were targeted and killed while at their home or on their way home. All targeted, one could conclude, by someone whose sole motivation was to kill a cop.

In 2018, the Criminal Justice Information Services Division within the FBI released a report entitled [Ambushes and Unprovoked Attacks: Assaults on Our Nation's Law Enforcement Officers](#). This comprehensive report concluded: "while the overall number of officers who were feloniously killed was declining, the percentage of officers feloniously killed during surprise attacks was increasing."

Now that we have established that attacks on officers have been increasing and that a significant number of assailants are motivated by a desire to hurt or kill an officer, we must ask: *how did we get here?* How did we reach a point in our communities where law enforcement officers went from being universally respected as "Officer Friendly"—a figure parents would urge their children to seek out if they were ever in trouble—to being the subject of such distrust and disdain? And why is there no sense of urgency to address this issue in the Senate or in the Administration?

We have clearly documented a terrifying increase in violence targeted at police. Yet Congress is taking no action to address this epidemic when it could be considering the "Protect and Serve Act"—which is something this committee ought to be considering.

And yet, following the turmoil of the 2020 election and credible threats of violence against poll workers and election officials, the U.S. Justice Department has launched a full task force to address these threats. This is obviously a serious matter, and the FOP has been engaged in outreach to the field about this effort, but I am disappointed that we know—we *know*—that law enforcement officers are already under threat and are being shot and killed because of the job we do—just like the election worker—and there seems to be a greater sense of urgency to potential violence against election workers than actual violence against law enforcement officers. For the record, there is no similar task force to address violence against police.

In response to threats against election officials, Senator Ossoff has introduced S. 2928, the “Election Worker and Polling Place Protection Act,” which is very similar to Senator Tillis’ S. 774, the “Protect and Serve Act,” and creates a new Federal offense in the criminal code.

Similarly, Senator Blumenthal has introduced S. 2528, the “Journalist Protection Act,” which creates a new Federal offense and allows Federal charges to be brought against anyone who inflicts bodily harm on a journalist.

Why does Congress believe that election officials and journalists suddenly need additional support and protection? Because of a sharp increase in vile and violent rhetoric aimed at them for simply doing their job. And, because we know—we have actual data—that demonstrates an escalation of rhetoric against occupants of a particular profession ultimately leads to violence. In June 2018, we witnessed the killing of five journalists in Annapolis, Maryland by a gunman who escalated verbal harassment into mass murder.

We have seen it and documented it in the profession of law enforcement since 2015. The erosion of respect for law enforcement coupled with public figures spewing anti-police rhetoric—rhetoric that is amplified by social media platforms—has fueled greater aggression towards police officers than what has been seen in previous years—undoubtedly emboldening people to turn verbal assaults into brazen acts of violence against law enforcement. Anti-police rhetoric led to the mass murders of law enforcement officers in Dallas, Baton Rouge, and countless other instances in which an individual was motivated solely by a desire to injure or kill a cop.

Yet there is no sense of urgency, no Federal task force, and no recognition of the actual physical and too often lethal violence that has targeted our nation’s law enforcement. Frankly, enough is enough. We need this Committee, if it is serious about addressing this kind of hate-fueled violence, to act and to act soon on S. 744, the “Protect and Serve Act.”

The hostility toward law enforcement is not just limited to those who attack officers, it has also been displayed by the public at large. In September 2020, two Los Angeles County Sheriff’s Department deputies were shot in the head by a coward when he walked up to their squad car and ambushed them as they sat there in their vehicle. Anti-police protesters descended on the Los Angeles hospital where the two deputies were

fighting for their lives. As they blocked the entrance and exit of the hospital emergency room, the anti-police agitators repeatedly chanted, “We hope they die!” Few condemned this heinous act and even fewer were surprised.

Violent and hateful rhetoric, if left unchallenged, leads to physical violence. We have seen it happen on a widespread basis in the profession of law enforcement and now it seems the Administration and Congress fear that verbal and social media attacks on journalists and election officials could become violent physical attacks. This is a legitimate concern because we know it is happening to law enforcement officers.

To be in law enforcement is to put yourself in harm’s way, but no officer should be at risk while simply sitting in their patrol car, standing a post, or heading for home at the end of a shift. When a member of the public calls for help, we answer that call. Now is the time for our elected officials at every level of government to answer our call and support law enforcement by addressing the surge of targeted violence against police officers.

We are asking for your help now, and I again urge this Committee to consider S. 774, the “Protect and Serve Act,” and send it to the floor for a vote. 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. By passing this legislation, you will demonstrate in a very real way that Congress supports the men and women in law enforcement, because right now, they feel completely abandoned.

Finally, I ask that each one of you join us in calling on all Americans, in every community across the country, to join us in taking a stand—to say, “enough is enough!” To make it absolutely clear that this type of deliberate and targeted violence is completely unacceptable; it’s a stain on our society, and it must end. We must challenge the hateful rhetoric that leads to this violence—whether it is against a cop, a reporter, or a poll worker—and let our communities know that it is not acceptable. It is incumbent upon you, our elected officials, as well as our community leaders, to stand up and support our men and women, and speak out against the violence aimed at law enforcement officers.

I thank you all again for this opportunity to speak for the 364,000 officers in every region of our great nation. I would be pleased to answer any further questions for the record.