



PATRICK YOES
National President

NATIONAL FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE

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JIM PASCO
Executive Director

10 July 2020

The Honorable David J. Trone
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Guy L. Reschenthaler
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Representatives Trone and Reschenthaler,

I am writing on behalf of the members of the Fraternal Order of Police to advise you of our support for H.R. 7568, the “Public Safety Officer Support Act.” This legislation would expand the eligibility of certain officers or their surviving family for death and disability benefits as provided for by the Public Safety Officers’ Benefits (PSOB) program.

The brave men and women serving our communities as law enforcement officers put themselves in harm’s way on a daily basis. As a profession, we are doing a very good job at protecting our officers’ physical safety by providing them with tools like anti-ballistic body armor, but far too often we have failed to recognize or address the tremendous mental stress our officers endure as a consequence of their service.

Law enforcement and other public safety officers face a 25.6 times higher risk of developing post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) than those in other professions and some statistics suggest that a law enforcement officer will experience more traumatic events in six months than the average person will experience in a lifetime. While we are improving as a profession, mental wellness services are too often unavailable to these officers, which leads to a greater risk for long-term mental health consequences. We believe that law enforcement suicides are underreported, but to the best of our knowledge, 228 officers took their own lives in 2019—outstripping the 147 line of duty deaths for that year.

Your legislation provides that a diagnosis of PTSD and similar mental health-related issues will be presumed to “constitute personal injury” as defined in the PSOB statute. The bill further establishes a presumption that an officer who dies by suicide or is disabled by PTSD or an attempt to commit suicide is a “direct and proximate result” of their service as a law enforcement or other public safety officer, absent competent psychological or medical evidence to the contrary. The legislation establishes that an officer with PTSD is to be considered disabled for the purposes of the PSOB disability benefit if the officer is “unable to serve as a public safety officer in the same or substantially similar role” prior to being disabled.

This bill, at long last, addresses what we have known for many years—that long-term exposure to mental stress and traumatic events over the course of service can inflict “invisible injuries” on the men and women in law enforcement. The fact is that severe PTSD is just as disabling as a physical injury and an officer who suffers from this or a similar disorder that may result in suicide is just as service-connected as

a line-of-duty death. We believe this legislation shows compassion and support for our officers and their families and that it provides another step in building support for officers facing mental wellness crises.

On behalf of the more than 351,000 members of the Fraternal Order of Police, I am deeply grateful to you both for your support and leadership on this important issue. I am proud to strongly support this legislation and look forward to working with you to move it through Congress. If I can provide any additional information or support on this issue, please feel free to contact me or Executive Director Jim Pasco in my Washington office.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Patrick Yoes", with a large, stylized flourish extending to the right.

Patrick Yoes
National President