



Office of the Attorney General
Washington, D. C. 20530

November 18, 2003

Mr. Chuck Canterbury
President
Fraternal Order of Police
309 Massachusetts Avenue, N.E
Washington, D.C. 20002

Dear President Canterbury

Thank you for your letter about concerns over the effectiveness of ballistic body armor made with Zylon. I share your concerns and commit to working with the Fraternal Order of Police ("FOP") on this issue. The safety of our nation's law enforcement officers is of utmost importance to me.

The use of weapons by those with a criminal intent poses a constant threat to our law enforcement officers, regardless of the type of crime. We have seen routine traffic stops result in unexpected armed confrontations and armed robberies resulting in shootouts. As a direct result of body armor being used by law enforcement, lives have been spared. Today, numerous manufacturers produce bullet-resistant vests and participate in the National Institute of Justice's ("NIJ") voluntary compliance testing program. Every aspect of the NIJ program is aimed at protecting our law enforcement officers on the street from a variety of weapons now used.

I am aware that a bullet-resistant vest manufactured with Zylon was penetrated in a shooting incident in June 2003, resulting in injury to a police officer. The vest, which had only been issued approximately six months prior to the incident, met the National Institute of Justice ("NIJ") standard for new vests. If the Justice Department determines that the manufacturer of the vest knowingly sold a defective product, then that manufacturer will be prohibited from further participation in the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Program under debarment regulations.

In addition, I have today directed that the following actions be taken:

Examination and Report. The National Institute of Justice ("NIJ") will immediately initiate a formal examination of the body armor in question (both new and used). Upgrade kits provided by manufacturers to retrofit Zylon-based bulletproof vests will be included in the study. NIJ also will review the existing process by which ballistic body armor is certified to determine if the process needs modifications. NIJ will report to me within 90 days on status and activities.

Information. The Office of Justice Programs (“OJP”) will make available to the law enforcement community up-to-date information about ballistic body armor, including information from NIJ’s examination, research and testing, manufacturers’ statements, and other relevant information. This information will be provided on the website of the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Program administered by the Bureau of Justice Assistance (“BJA”). In addition, state and local law enforcement agency grantees and law enforcement associations like FOP will be contacted as new information becomes available.

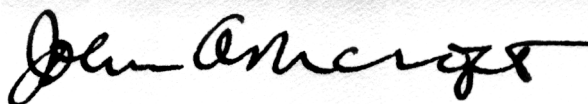
Summit. OJP will convene a summit within 120 days with representatives of federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement; law enforcement associations; manufacturers of bullet-resistant fabric and equipment; and standards and testing organizations. Summit participants will review the information available from NIJ’s examination, including the suitability of Zylon-based body armor for law enforcement use and the effectiveness of NIJ’s certification process. Summit participants also will consider the future of bullet-resistant technology and testing technology.

Replacement. OJP will work with state and local law enforcement agencies that have purchased Zylon-based bulletproof vests to ensure they are fully aware of all information available about the product and, if necessary, will assist them in their efforts to replace any defective equipment

Since its introduction over 30 years ago, body armor has saved more than 2,700 lives. Law enforcement officers who do not wear body armor increase the risk of being killed or injured in the line of duty. It is my hope that recent incidents have not in any way deterred law enforcement officers from wearing available body armor as they perform their daily law enforcement duties.

Thank you for your support and assistance on this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Ashcroft", written over a light grey horizontal line.

John D. Ashcroft
Attorney General