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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-6275

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The Honorable Lamar Smith
United States House of Representatives
Chairman, Committee on the Judiciary
2409 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Smith 

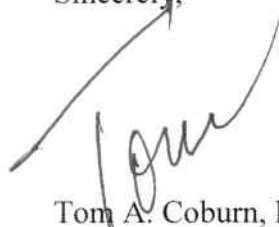
I write to discuss the Dale Long Public Safety Officers' Benefits Improvements Act, which would expand the Department of Justice's Public Safety Officers Benefits Program (PSOB) to include nonprofit and volunteer ground and air ambulance crew members and first responders. Currently, only those public safety officers who are employed by the federal, state, or local government are eligible to collect public safety officers' death and disability benefits as administered by PSOB.

I have serious federalism concerns with a federal program that provides state and local employees with death and disability benefits, and I believe expanding it will only swell the number of people who have a vested interest in preserving the program. I understand the bill contains numerous improvements to the PSOB program and other cost-saving provisions. And, I recognize the Congressional Budget Office has indicated it will not have a significant net effect on the federal budget; however, I am not inclined to support expanding a program that violates the basic principles of federalism.

As you likely know, the PSOB program was originally created to be a model to the states to demonstrate how they could structure their own successful programs. Yet, not only did most states did not create their own programs, over the last thirty years Congress has continued to expand the PSOB benefits available. Our country is currently more than \$15 trillion in debt, and in the past ten years alone, we have almost doubled the size of the federal government. Congress must start making tough decisions rather than continue to kick the can down the road, leaving our children and grandchildren to clean up the mess. It is immoral to do this to future generations. Instead of expanding a program that is not the responsibility of the federal government, we should be working to terminate it.

I would appreciate hearing your thoughts on the federalism concerns I raise with regard to this bill and the PSOB program in general. Please call or write to me at your earliest convenience.

Sincerely,



Tom A. Coburn, M.D.
U.S. Senator