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TESTIMONY

of

Chuck Canterbury

National President,

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on

“Voices from the Field”

before the

President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing

23 February 2015

Good morning Chief Ramsey, Ms. Robinson and distinguished members of the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing and thank you for allowing me to come before you a second time to share with you the “voices from the field” and the perspective of our membership.

Soon, the members of this Task Force will begin its final report and we expect it will contain recommendations for improving policing at all levels of government. I would like to take the opportunity today to offer the officer safety priorities of the FOP and would ask the Task Force incorporate them into their own report.

I spoke about the need to expand Federal hate crimes laws to include protection for law enforcement officers at the inaugural Listening Session, so I will not go into detail save to say that this is a very, very important issue for the officers in the field. Of the 47 firearms deaths in 2014, 19% were officers killed by ambush, by an individual or pair of individuals that were looking to kill a law enforcement officer. I have appended a brief description of each of those attacks in my submitted testimony. If their objective had been to kill a Muslim, a black man, or a transgender woman, they could

be charged under the hate crimes law. I see no reason why the same should not be true simply because they targeted police.

I hope that the Task Force will recommend that the Bulletproof Vest Partnership (BVP) grant program be reauthorized by Congress.

This program has a very simple goal – it proposes to increase the number of officers wearing soft body armor by providing matching Federal funding to purchase armor vests. There is no legislation, no government program, no grant that can erase the sad fact that law enforcement officers will die in the line of duty. And now, more than ever, we see our officers in the cross-hairs of these criminals. But this program can document more than 3,100 officers whose lives were saved because they were wearing soft body armor. How many other government programs can document their success so starkly?

The House has twice passed legislation by a nearly unanimous margin that would have created a “National Blue Alert” system for the local, regional and national dissemination of time-sensitive information to help identify a suspect in the event that a law enforcement officer is killed or seriously injured in the line of duty. Both times the bill was blocked by a single Senator, whose recent retirement I welcomed.

The legislation would leverage the current AMBER Alert system by using existing communications infrastructure to disseminate immediately sensitive information to enlist the public's help in identifying the whereabouts of a dangerous suspect. While more than 20 States already have some form of Blue Alert system, there are large gaps in the system and a national program is vital to fill those gaps.

Had the assassin who executed NYC Officers Ramos and Liu not taken his own life and took flight instead, a Blue Alert could have been issued to put the public on notice and enlisted their help in tracking down a cop-killer. The FOP has worked closely with Congress to change the bill so that a Blue Alert could also be issued in the event of a clear and imminent threat to a law enforcement officer or officers. I expect that legislation, now named in honor of those two officers, to be introduced in Congress this week and I hope that its enactment is one of the recommendations of this Task Force.

For the last 20 years, community-oriented policing has been at the very core of our nation's policing and crime-fighting strategy. But when crime rates are down, budgets shrink. There are less officers on the streets and those who are on patrol are answering calls for

service and are unable to engage in pro-active, community-oriented policing. Community-oriented policing is a labor intensive undertaking and cannot be done effectively with the reduced number of officers on the streets today. Since 2009, the Federal government's State and local law enforcement assistance programs like COPS and others administered by the Bureau of Justice Assistance have been drastically reduced.

This Administration and the law enforcement community has a lot of faith in the COPS Office and its mission. We also know that community policing works. I urge the Task Force to reaffirm our national commitment to the community policing strategy and call for the full funding of the COPS Office.

The brutal murder of NYC Police Officer Edward R. Byrne in 1988 was, like far too many attacks on law enforcement, an ambush that resulted in his death. But that killing, commissioned by an incarcerated drug dealer who wanted to burnish his reputation by killing a cop, led to the realization that our local and State officers and their agencies needed more resources if they were to protect the public and themselves. The Edward Byrne Memorial Justice Assistant Grant program, once established, quickly became the

cornerstone Federal crime prevention and crime-fighting program, enabling communities to target resources to their most pressing local needs. The inherent flexibility of the program allows States and local communities to address needs and fill gaps across the entire criminal justice system.

However, since FY10, the Byrne-JAG program has been reduced by over one-third, causing a serious contraction in the reach of Byrne-JAG funded programs across the States and territories. If additional reductions are made, successful programs will be pulled from the field and the partnership between Federal, State and local law enforcement will be further weakened. Hundreds of communities will lose a range of critical grant funding and their public safety will be compromised. I hope the Task Force will endorse the work this program has done to date and recommend it be fully funded.

Finally, I would like to endorse the testimony given by Chuck Wexler from PERF with respect to the importance of open communication and mutual respect between labor and management. Ongoing dialogue with the shared public safety goal is a must, even in the absence of collective bargaining. That said, dialogue between

the rank-and-file should compliment, not supplant, the collective bargaining process.

In closing, I would like to thank you for having me here today and I am pleased to answer any questions you might have.