



# FRATERNAL ORDER OF POLICE

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Testimony of  
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**“When Badges Become Targets: How Anti-Law Enforcement  
Rhetoric Fuels Violence Against Officers”**

**before the Committee on Homeland Security  
in the U.S. House of Representatives**



Good morning, Mr. Chairman, Ranking Member Thompson, and the other Members of the distinguished Committee on Homeland Security. My name is Patrick Yoes and I am the National President of the Fraternal Order of Police (FOP). I thank you for the opportunity to talk about the alarming increase in deliberate and targeted attacks on law enforcement officers at every level of government.

The Fraternal Order of Police is the oldest and largest law enforcement labor organization in the United States, representing more than 382,000 members in over 2,200 local lodges in every region of the country. We represent rank-and-file law enforcement officers who serve in departments of all sizes—from small rural agencies to large urban departments.

We thank the Committee for having this hearing to discuss the issue of violence and threats of violence targeting law enforcement officers. Since the latter half of 2015, the National FOP has been collecting data on officers who are shot in the line of duty. We undertook this effort because there seemed to be a measurable increase in the number of officers who were injured by a firearm. Officers who are shot and killed in the line of duty are tracked by many different organizations—the National FOP, the Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) program, the National Law Enforcement Officers' Memorial Fund (NLEOMF), and the Officers Down Memorial Page (ODMP) as well as various other groups at the State and local levels. But, apart from the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted (LEOKA) program, no one was collecting data on officers who were shot but survived. The FOP stepped up and began collecting this data in an effort geared to identify ambush attacks on officers because we view these attacks as the most dangerous to our officers.

The National FOP took the definition of “ambush” or “ambush-style” attacks from an October 2015 report from the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS Office) within the U.S. Department of Justice entitled [Ambushes of Police](#). Ambush attacks are sudden and surprising to the victim. There is no provocation and excessive force is used in most ambush attacks. To the extent that we were able, we worked to identify ambush attacks but soon learned that data on officers who survived being shot, regardless of the circumstances, was valuable.

In 2018, the COPS Office, under the auspices of the National Blue Alert Program, also began tracking this data. In 2019, the National FOP was awarded a COPS grant from 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. We provide monthly reports to the COPS Office, the public, policymakers here in Washington, and media outlets. The COPS Office has been publishing an annual report every spring since 2020 using data collected by the National FOP.

A record number of officers—378—were shot in the line of duty in 2023, 50 of whom were killed. There were 115 ambush-style attacks on law enforcement in which 138 officers were shot and 20 of whom were killed. Of the officers killed by

gunfire in 2023, 44% were ambushed.

Last year was the very first time in the decade that we have been tracking this data that the number of officers shot in the line of duty declined. In 2024, 342 officers were shot in the line of duty, 50 of whom were killed. There were 62 ambush-style attacks on law enforcement in which 79 officers were shot, 18 of whom were killed.

As of this Monday, 314 officers have been shot in the line of duty, 43 of whom were killed. There have been 62 ambush-style attacks on law enforcement officers in which 83 officers were shot, 21 of whom were killed.

This violence spans the nation, with Texas reporting the most incidents (39 officers shot as of 30 November), followed by Georgia (23), Florida (19), Pennsylvania (18), and Ohio (17).

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.

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.

In May 2017, the FBI released a report entitled [The Assailant Study: Mindset and Behavior](#). The report identified a disturbing trend of attackers who are motivated by a desire and willingness to kill law enforcement officers. 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.

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. This aligns with the concept of “stochastic terrorism,” where inflammatory rhetoric creates a climate that emboldens individuals to commit independent acts of violence without explicit direction.

One such example is the Maryland man who shot and seriously injured his girlfriend before deciding to drive to New York City to kill police officers in retribution for the death of Eric Garner, posting on social media: "I'm putting Wings on Pigs Today ... They Take 1 of Ours ... Lets Take 2 of Theirs." Upon arrival, he approached the passenger window of a New York City Police Department (NYPD) patrol car and opened fire. Officers Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu were struck in the head and upper body and died at the scene.

Anti-police rhetoric led to the mass murders of law enforcement officers in Dallas and Baton Rouge in 2016, along with too many other instances in which an individual was motivated solely by a desire to injure or kill a cop. Surges in anti-police sentiment following high-profile events like officer involved shootings have been linked to increased assaults on officers. The National FOP believes that dehumanizing language erodes respect for the badge and emboldens those predisposed to harm officers by ambush when attacks are unexpected. For example, a December 2017 study by the COPS Office, 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, standing post, or were targeted and killed while at their homes 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 U.S. House of Representatives?

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 H.R. 1551, the "Protect and Serve Act"—yet the House Judiciary Committee refuses to bring the bill to mark-up because Members of the Freedom Caucus serving on that committee oppose the bill. 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 like those in New York City, Dallas, and Baton Rouge. The bill was drafted as a direct response to the increased number of law enforcement officers who have been targeted.

The Administration has been extremely supportive of law enforcement. President Trump has issued two Executive Orders—one directing the Justice Department to seek enhanced sentences for crimes against law enforcement officers, another ending the Biden moratorium on the use of the Federal death penalty.

Vice President Vance was the keynote speaker at our National Peace Officers Memorial Service this year. In his remarks, the Vice President recognized the importance of the event and called for a return to law and order in our communities. He addressed these ambush attacks on officers and stated that the Administration would direct Federal resources to law enforcement officers to improve training and pay. He additionally stated that the Administration would create new legal protections for officers and seek the death penalty for those convicted of harming law enforcement officers.

Yet there is no sense of urgency in Congress and no recognition of the actual physical and too often lethal violence that has targeted our nation's law enforcement. Today's hearing, Mr. Chairman, is the first time that the House has examined this issue since 2018 when the "Protect and Serve Act" passed on an overwhelming 382-35 vote. Prior to the floor vote, the bill favorably reported by committee on a unanimous vote.

I know the bill is not within this committee's jurisdiction, and I do give credit to Chairman Jordan for his repeated attempts to schedule a mark-up on the bill. Unfortunately, he and the National FOP have not been able to overcome the bill's Republican opponents. But I welcome this opportunity to speak directly to Members of this distinguished committee about the critical importance of this bill.

We have clearly documented a terrifying increase in violence targeted at police. Yet Congress is taking no action to address this epidemic. 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 frustrating to our members because 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 workers. There seems to be a greater sense of urgency to address potential violence against election workers than actual violence against law enforcement officers. In the previous Congress, Representative Gottheimer, the lead Democrat on the "Protect and Serve Act," introduced the "Election Worker and Polling Place Protection Act," which is very similar to the "Protect and Serve Act," and creates a new Federal offense in the criminal code. As far as I know, no election workers were targeted or killed in any recent election.

Similarly, Representative Swalwell, who is not a cosponsor of the "Protect and Serve Act," has introduced H.R. 3203, 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. I recognize this is a horrific tragedy, but it is difficult to compare the slaughter of five journalists in one mass murder with the fact that 656 officers were shot in just the last two years and 11 months.

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. It has increased greatly this year and is directed to Federal law enforcement in Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and the Border Patrol in part because of the Administration's efforts to enforce the nation's immigration laws. We didn't write those laws, but we are sworn to uphold them and enforce them. The public has directed their anger and hostility toward these Federal agents—who, again, are just doing their jobs—as well as the State and local officers assisting them or just serving their communities. All of that anger, amplified by social media, has led to an enormous spike in attacks against ICE agents. These officers are in physical jeopardy not just from the criminals they pursue, but from those motivated and triggered by anti-law enforcement sentiments.

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 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 them. We will continue our efforts to get H.R. 1551 through the Committee on the Judiciary, and I thank you all again for this opportunity to speak for the 382,000 officers in every region of our great nation and the importance of this legislation to them.

I would be pleased to answer any further questions for the record.