



The Washington Report

The Newsletter of the National Association of Police Organizations
Representing America's Finest

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NAPO Victory! Congress Passes PSOB Improvement Act

On May 17th, in a major victory for NAPO and public safety officers across the country, Congress unanimously passed the Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) Improvement Act (S. 419), a bipartisan bill sponsored by Senators Charles Grassley (R-IA) and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY). This Act will tackle the issues of transparency and the timeliness of case determinations within the PSOB program, and protect the ability of survivors, disabled officers and their families to get the benefits they so rightly deserve.

Importantly, this Act returns the PSOB Program to a presumptive benefit and restores the "substantial weight" standard that requires PSOB to give substantial weight to the findings of federal, state, and local agencies as to the cause of the public safety officer's death or disability. It ensures that children of fallen or disabled public safety officers will still be eligible for education benefits if an adjudication delay causes them to age out of benefit eligibility before their claim is approved. It increases transparency through weekly and quarterly public reports on the status of claims.

The PSOB Improvement Act significantly improves the PSOB Program and address several concerns NAPO has had with the program since the last major rulemaking in 2006 that implemented, among other changes, the Hometown Heroes Survivors Benefits Act of 2003. NAPO worked closely with Senators Grassley and Gillibrand on the development of this legislation after the Senate Judiciary Committee held an oversight hearing on the program in May of 2015 and after a scathing Justice Department Office of Inspector General Report in July of 2015. Both the hearing and the Inspector General report revealed that the PSOB Program had no accountability or transparency and there were extreme inefficiencies in the processing of claims, leading to a backlog of over 1,000 cases.

This bill passed the Senate at the end of last Congress, but we ran out of time before we could move it through the House. After years of frustration with the PSOB Program, we are glad to see the enactment of this important legislation, which is a triumph for NAPO and rank-and-file officers across the nation.

It is a priority for NAPO that we ensure the PSOB Program is processing and deciding claims in a timely manner and that the process is transparent and straightforward for those who have lost their loved ones or have become seriously disabled in the line of duty. The passage of the PSOB Improvement Act is a major step in the right direction and we will continue to work as part of the PSOB stakeholder community to hold the Program accountable.

NAPO thanks Senators Grassley and Gillibrand for being our champions on this important issue. If you have any questions about the PSOB Program or the PSOB Improvement Act please contact Andy Edmiston at aedmiston@napo.org.

NAPO Victory! House Passes Thin Blue Line Act

On May 18th, in a significant step toward increasing protections for law enforcement officers, the House voted and passed the Thin Blue Line Act (H.R. 115) by a bipartisan vote of 271-143, with 48 Democrats voting for the bill. This important bill, sponsored by Congressman Vern Buchanan (R-FL), would make the targeting of, attempted killing, or killing of a police officer, firefighter, or first responder an aggravating factor in death penalty determinations in federal court. This would be applicable whether they were targeted or murdered on duty, because of the performance of their duty, or because of their status as a public official. The only requirement is that the homicide provide federal jurisdiction.

This bill is critical, as law enforcement officer assaults, injuries, and deaths have increased sharply in recent years. According to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, there have been 51 line-of-duty deaths so far this year, which is a 31% increase from this time last year and follows one of the deadliest years for law enforcement in five years. 135 officers were killed in the line of duty in 2016, 64 of whom were shot and killed. 21 of those gun-related deaths were by ambush – the officers were targeted and killed simply because they were police officers. This was a 167% increase in ambush-style killings of law enforcement officers.

Tepid responses to the murders of police officers do nothing to discourage future attacks, which is why legislation like the Thin Blue Line Act is so important. NAPO strongly believes that establishing stricter penalties for those who harm or target for harm law enforcement officers will deter violent crimes and add another layer of safety for the nation's law enforcement officers, who put their lives on the line each day to protect our communities.

NAPO thanks Congressman Buchanan for his leadership on this legislation as well as House Judiciary Committee Chairman Robert Goodlatte (R-VA) and his staff, who were essential to moving this bill on the House floor. NAPO is now working with Senator Pat Toomey (R-PA), who is the sponsor of the Senate companion bill (S. 1085), to move this bill through the Senate. We will keep our members updated on the status of this important bill.

NAPO Victory! Congress Passes American Law Enforcement Heroes Act

In another victory for NAPO, Congress passed the American Law Enforcement Heroes Act (H.R. 1428 / S. 583) on May 17th. This Act, sponsored by Congressman Will Hurd (R-TX) and Senator John Cornyn (R-TX), encourages state and local law enforcement agencies to hire veterans as new law enforcement officers. It creates a preference within the COPS Hiring Program for those agencies and departments who hire veterans. There have been successful initiatives in the past within the COPS Hiring Program – Troops to COPS most notably – that incentivized the hiring of veterans. The Troops to COPS initiative benefited nearly 1,000 veterans.

NAPO supports the American Law Enforcement Heroes Act because it stays true to the original intent of the COPS Program – the hiring and retention of community police officers. Many officers who serve our communities are veterans, and due to their military experience, came to the profession with exceptional training and qualifications. This program not only helps veterans who are facing high unemployment rates, but it also helps the many law enforcement agencies and departments that have serious shortfalls in manpower. It also underscores the importance of supporting and funding the COPS Hiring Program.

NAPO thanks Congressman Hurd and Senator Cornyn for their continued support of America's law enforcement. We look forward to seeing it signed into law by President Trump.

Senate Passes Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act

On May 16th, NAPO and rank-and-file officers across the country gained another win when the Senate passed the Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act (S. 867), sponsored by Senators Joe Donnelly (D-IN) and Todd Young (R-IN). NAPO worked closely with Senator Donnelly on this important legislation, which will help law enforcement agencies establish or enhance mental health care services for their officers. The legislation will make grants available to initiate peer mentoring pilot programs, develop resources for mental health providers based on the specific mental health challenges faced by law enforcement, and support law enforcement officers by studying the effectiveness of crisis hotlines and annual mental health checks.

According to the National Study of Police Suicides, officers are 2.5 times more likely to die from suicides than from homicides. State and local law enforcement officers are our nation's first responders. They respond to our country's greatest tragedies as well as violent crimes that unfortunately occur more frequently in our communities. They have seen and experienced horrors that they cannot forget, yet they still put their lives on the line every day to protect and serve our communities. It is time that we as a nation recognize the stress and strain of the job and give officers the resources they need to address their emotional and mental wellbeing.

NAPO proudly supports this bill and sees its passage in the Senate as an important victory in the fight to ensure officers across the country have access to the best mental health services available and feel supported in using those services.

NAPO thanks Senator Donnelly and Senator Young for their support of the law enforcement community and their leadership on this important issue. We are working with Congresswoman Susan Brooks (R-IN) on moving this legislation quickly through the House and will keep our members updated on its status. If you have any questions about this bill, please contact Andy Edmiston at aedmiston@napo.org.

NAPO Participates in Democratic Steering Committee Law Enforcement Roundtable

On May 17th, NAPO Executive Director Bill Johnson participated in an intimate roundtable discussion on the opioid epidemic and grants and funding for state and local law enforcement hosted by the Senate Democratic Law Enforcement Caucus. **Minority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY), Senators Amy Klobuchar (D-MN), Chris Coons (D-DE), Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Bob Casey (D-PA), Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), Jeff Merkley (D-CO), Tim Kaine (D-VA), Patty Murray (D-WA), Catherine Cortez Masto (D-NV), Richard Blumenthal (D-CT), Claire McCaskill (D-MO), Debbie Stabenow (D-MI), Richard Durbin (D-IL), and Tom Carper (D-DE)** participated in the roundtable with Johnson and representatives of the Fraternal Order of Police, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, Major City Chiefs Association, Major County Sheriffs of America and individual police chiefs.

During the discussion, most of the chiefs and sheriffs focused on the serious drug and opioid issues they are facing back in their communities. The president for the Major City Chiefs Association praised the Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Program in terms of the policies it has promoted, not the hiring program. He stated that the COPS Office should promulgate national standards on use of force and dealing with civil disturbances. Johnson pushed back on that position and stated that the COPS Office should focus on hiring and emphasized NAPO's view that the genius of the COPS Hiring Program, as originally implemented, was that it was not a

Washington knows best, one size fits all approach, but it deferred to local agencies and mayors who knew best what each different community needed. Johnson also pointed out that the key to its success was putting men and women on the street, not the Bush Administration policy of diverting much-needed hiring funds to communications, drills and training.

Johnson went on to discuss improving diversity in the ranks and noted that the best way to do that was not to lower standards, citing recommendations in a [2016 Justice Department and Equal Employment Opportunity Commission report](#) on advancing diversity in law enforcement, but to assist qualified applicants to meet the necessary high standards to be trusted with safeguarding our communities. He used the Police Explorers and ROTC-type programs as examples of ways to help applicants get the needed high school and college degrees.

In addition to promoting the COPS Hiring Program for Congressional support, Johnson thanked the Senators for their efforts during National Police Week to pass several bills for law enforcement, specifically emphasizing the importance of the PSOB Improvement Act to our members and their families.

NAPO looks forward to working with the Caucus and Senate Democratic leadership to continue advancing the priority issues facing rank-and-file officers today.

Bill to Increase Protections for Law Enforcement Introduced

On May 16th, Senator John Cornyn (R-TX) and Congressman Ted Poe (R-TX) reintroduced the Back the Blue Act (S. 1134 / H.R. 2437). Senator John Cornyn (R-TX) and Congressman Poe worked with NAPO to introduce the Back the Blue Act in July 2016 after the horrific ambush attack that killed five Dallas police officers.

The Back the Blue Act is important for NAPO members because so many of our jurisdictions receive federal funding, and this legislation will help to bring federal resources to bear in the prosecution of those who attempt to murder or murder any of these officers. In addition to creating new federal crimes for violence against police officers, the bill would also establish a new federal crime for interstate flight to avoid prosecution for killing, attempting to kill, or conspiring to kill a federally funded public safety officer. It would also expressly allow all judges, prosecutors, and law enforcement officials, subject to limited regulations, to carry firearms into all federal facilities, federal courts, and in jurisdictions where the carrying of such weapons is otherwise prohibited by law.

NAPO has long supported enacting new federal criminal provisions to address (1) the assault and murder of federally-funded state and local law enforcement officers, such as those officers whose agencies or jurisdictions receive aid from the Departments of Justice or Homeland Security; and (2) the assault and murder of state and local officers engaged in the protection of federally recognized civil rights, such as those officers attacked while safeguarding protests. The Back the Blue Act would be a significant step towards increasing federal protections for state and local law enforcement, who are the front line in keeping our nation and our communities safe.

NAPO thanks Senator Cornyn and Congressman Poe for their steadfast support for law enforcement and dedication to reintroducing this critical piece of legislation. We look forward to working with them to see it passed into law.

House Passes Honoring Hometown Heroes Act

On May 18th, in yet another win for NAPO and the public safety community, the House passed the Honoring Hometown Heroes Act (H.R. 1892) by a vote of 411-1. This Act will permit the Governor of a state or territory to lower the American flag to half-staff in the tragic event that a law enforcement officer, firefighter or public safety officer from that jurisdiction dies in the line of duty. Currently, a Governor can only make this tribute for

the death of a present or formal government official or a member of the Armed Forces who dies in combat. This bill will ensure that first responders who make the ultimate sacrifice while protecting their communities will also have the simple, but meaningful honor of having the flag flown at half-staff.

NAPO thanks Congressman John Larson (D-CT) for his continued support of the public safety community and we now look to the Senate and working with Senator Jon Tester (D-MT) to pass this important bill.

NAPO in the News

On May 16th, NAPO's Executive Director Bill Johnson was quoted in an article for the *Conservative Review* entitled, "National Police Week: Congress to Consider 5 Pro-Cop Bills". This article focused on five of the many pro-law enforcement bill that Congress has and continues to consider during National Police Week: the Thin Blue Line Act, the Honoring Hometown Heroes Act, the American Law Enforcement Heroes Act, Strengthening State and Local Cyber Crime Fighting Act, and the Probation Officer Protection Act.

Johnson was quoted regarding the need for the Thin Blue Line Act, which:

"William J. Johnson, executive director of the National Association of Police Organizations (NAPO), lauded the bill in January, citing a steep increase in targeted, ambush-style killings of police officers.

"Establishing stricter penalties for those who harm or target law enforcement officers will deter crime," Johnson said in a [press release](#) for the bill's sponsor, Rep. Vern Buchanan, R-Fl. "Any persons contemplating harming an officer must know that they will face serious punishments."

The full article can be found at: <https://www.conservativereview.com/articles/national-police-week-congress-to-consider-5-pro-cop-bills>

NAPO will continue to ensure our members' voices are heard loud and clear on the Hill, with the Administration, and in the media. If you have any questions about the publication cited above, please contact Bill Johnson at: bjohnson@napo.org.

NAPO Recognizes Congressional Champions at Annual Legislative Luncheon



NAPO held its Annual Legislative Awards Luncheon and Lobby Day on May 11, 2017. Our members met with and recognized members of Congress and their staff for their outstanding support for the law enforcement community. The **Chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Charles Grassley (R-IA)**, was recognized for his leadership on the PSOB Improvement Act and his dedication to making much needed improvements to the PSOB Program, in addition to his longstanding support for law enforcement. The Chairman addressed our members in accepting his award and recognized them for the important work they do day in and day out as law enforcement officers.

NAPO also recognized **Congressman Vern Buchanan (R-FL)** for his longstanding support of law enforcement and for his leadership on increasing protections for state and local law enforcement as the sponsor of the Thin Blue Line Act (H.R. 115). **Congressman Doug Collins (R-GA)** was recognized for his work to increase support and funding for the Mentally Ill Offender Treatment and Crime Reduction Act (MIOTRCA) and crisis intervention teams (CIT) for state and local law enforcement. **Congressman John Ratcliffe (R-TX)** was given an award for his dedication to ensuring state and local law enforcement regain unrestricted access to surplus military equipment, including sponsoring the Protecting Lives Using Surplus (PLUS) Equipment Act.

NAPO also recognized several staff for their outstanding work on behalf of America's law enforcement: **Carter Burwell**, judiciary counsel to Senator John Cornyn (R-TX); **Courtney Houston-Carter**, legislative aide to Senate Law Enforcement Caucus Co-Chair Senator Roy Blunt (R-MO); **Andrew Crawford**, judiciary counsel to Senate Law Enforcement Caucus Co-Chair Senator Chris Coons (D-DE); and **Danielle Cutrona**, senior counsel to then-Senator Jeff Sessions and current chief counsel to Attorney General Sessions.

NAPO gives a heartfelt thanks to all our Legislative Award winners for their work in support of law enforcement and for being true champions of NAPO's legislative priorities.

Please monitor NAPO's website, www.napo.org, and Facebook page: National Association of Police Organizations, and follow us on Twitter at NAPOpolice for breaking news and updates.