



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF POLICE ORGANIZATIONS, INC.

Representing America's Finest

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August 31, 2016

The Honorable Loretta Lynch
Attorney General
950 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20530

Dear Attorney General Lynch:

On behalf of the National Association of Police Organizations (NAPO), I am writing to you to express our extreme concern and disappointment that the Department of Justice has done nothing to begin implementing a national Blue Alert system.

The Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu National Blue Alert Act of 2015, named after two slain NAPO members, was signed into law by the President on May 19, 2015. In its August 12, 2016 response to a Freedom of Information Act request from a USA Today reporter, the Department of Justice stated that it had no records relating to the implementation of the Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu National Blue Alert Act. The Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS) Office was only just assigned the task of implementing the national blue alert system in June, over a year after the passage of this important legislation.

A statement from the COPS Office to USA Today (published in an August 30, 2016 article by reporter Gregory Korte entitled, "'Blue Alert' bill, signed with fanfare, now stalled in Justice Department") stated that "[s]ince the passage of the Blue Alert Act, the department has devoted time and consideration to ensure the most appropriate and well suited DOJ component lead this effort". It is indefensible that the Department took over a year to decide that the COPS Office should implement this system.

The creation of a national blue alert system is Action Item 6.1.1 of the Final Report of the President's Task Force on 21st Century Policing, which the COPS Office is in charge of implementing. The fact that Congress did not appropriate any funding for the establishment of a Blue Alert system is also no excuse for the Department to have taken no action on its implementation. The Department found the money necessary to fund other Task Force recommendations, including the Police Data Initiative through the Police Foundation. Additionally, according to the Task Force Annual Report, in 2015, the COPS Office "incentivized implementation of task force recommendations through the award of more than \$120 million in grants". None of those grants went to states to build Blue Alert systems or begin the integration of current systems.

27 states have blue alert systems, so there is no need to start from scratch. In fact, the purpose of the Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu National Blue Alert Act was to have the Department “encourage, enhance, and integrate Blue Alert plans throughout the United States”.

It is a slap in the face of law enforcement that the Department chose to implement and fund other recommendations over the one that was enacted by Congress and has the greatest chance of saving an officer’s life. It is just another example of this Administration not standing up for and defending the hundreds of thousands of federal, state, and local rank-and-file officers who put their lives on the line each day to keep our communities safe.

According to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (NLEOMF), on average, one law enforcement officer is killed in the line of duty somewhere in the United States every 61 hours. Moreover, preliminary data from the NLEOMF indicates a 52 percent increase in the number of officer firearm-related fatalities from August 2015 to August 2016. The Dallas shooter who killed five police officers and the Baton Rouge shooter who killed three officers both posted threats to law enforcement on social media prior to the attacks. In the wake of these killings, a national Blue Alert system is more imperative now than it ever was.

We are very disappointed that despite the fanfare surrounding the passage of the Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu National Blue Alert Act, the Department has chosen not to act on implementing a national Blue Alert system. In the USA Today article, the COPS Office stated that the Department will have an implementation plan within 60 days and we will hold the Department responsible for meeting that deadline.

Thank you for your consideration of this important matter. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (703) 549-0775.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William J. Johnson", followed by a long horizontal flourish.

William J. Johnson, Esq., CAE
Executive Director