



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF POLICE ORGANIZATIONS, INC.

Representing America's Finest

317 South Patrick Street. ~ Alexandria, Virginia ~ 22314-3501
(703) 549-0775 ~ (800) 322-NAPO ~ Fax: (703) 684-0515
www.napo.org ~ Email: info@napo.org

EXECUTIVE OFFICERS

April 9, 2024

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Florida Police Benevolent
Association

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Vice President
Police Benevolent
Association of New York City

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WILLIAM J. JOHNSON, CAE

Executive Director and
General Counsel

The Honorable Richard Durbin
Chair
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Lindsey Graham
Ranking Member
Committee on the Judiciary
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Durbin and Ranking Member Graham,

I am writing on behalf of the National Association of Police Organizations (NAPO) and the over 241,000 sworn law enforcement officers we represent across the country. As the Committee conducts an oversight hearing on the U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ) Office of Community Oriented Policing Services (COPS), I want to advise you of our unwavering support for the program and its importance to our nation's law enforcement community.

Serving as the lead national law enforcement organization, NAPO worked tirelessly with members of Congress and the Administration to enact the COPS Program in 1994. Since its inception, the COPS Program has been extremely successful in implementing and carrying out its designated objectives.

The COPS Office has assisted over 13,000 law enforcement agencies with over \$20 billion in funding to hire more than 136,000 community police officers across the United States. Funding through its various grant programs has contributed to continued achievements in improving law enforcement and community relations; combating crime, drugs, and gangs in our communities; and addressing emerging law enforcement needs, including officer mental health and wellness. A big part of the success of this program is its reliance on local law enforcement agencies in defining what their communities need and meeting those needs.

In recent years, Congress has passed legislation to enhance the ability of the COPS Office to support state and local law enforcement. Many of these measures were sponsored by Members of the Committee, such as the Law Enforcement Mental Health and Wellness Act and the Supporting and Treating Officers in Crisis Act, the Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu National Blue Alert Act, expanded access to active shooter training through the POLICE Act, and activities authorized by the Law Enforcement De-Escalation Training Act. These programs are vital to state and local law enforcement's ability to serve and protect our communities efficiently and effectively.

Further, the COPS Office, together with the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) and the National Institute of Justice (NIJ), organizes and runs the National Officer Safety and

Wellness (OSW) Group. The OSW Group is a long-standing gathering comprised of federal, state, and local law enforcement associations that aims to better understand and respond to the range of issues associated with improving officer safety and wellness.

Law Enforcement agencies across the country serving urban, rural, big, and small communities are struggling to enlist qualified candidates to help alleviate staffing shortages. A 2019 survey from the International Association of Chiefs of Police on the recruitment and retention of law enforcement officers shows 78% of agencies are having difficulty recruiting qualified candidates, 65% are having too few candidates applying, and 75% are stating that recruiting is more difficult today than it was five years ago. 25% of responding agencies have eliminated agency services, units, and positions because of staffing difficulties. These issues have only been exacerbated since 2019.

Law enforcement officials and the public recognize the benefits of putting more police on the street, which is why COPS Office initiatives to put and maintain more officers in the field to promote community policing, fight crime, and improve officer safety and wellness should be continued and supported.

NAPO has long prioritized fully funding the COPS Program and maintaining the program's original intent – helping states and localities hire and retain community police officers to ensure they can protect and serve America's communities.

We look forward to working with the Committee to support our nation's state, local, and Tribal law enforcement through the COPS Office's vital grant programs.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William J. Johnson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

William J. Johnson
Executive Director