

Honorable Chairman and Committee Members,

My husband, Wayne Leon, a Cleveland police officer, was killed in the line of duty on June 25, 2000. Our children were 2, 4 and 5 at the time of his death. We were married for 8 years and he was a police officer for 6 years. Wayne was shot and killed during a traffic stop by a violent fugitive that was on the run and did not want to go back to prison. After he shot Wayne, the perpetrator had a shootout with a security guard who witnessed the incident and then the perpetrator fled the scene. He was arrested later that evening in Columbus by very brave police officers. In a moment my identity changed, I was now a widow, a single parent and a survivor. I was forced to go on without my best friend, the person I was supposed to grow old with and without a witness to my life. But what is worse, is that three children lost their father. I know the type of father he wanted to be for our children; the qualities he had I can't duplicate. Living life without Wayne has been unimaginably difficult. P

Today, I would like to thank each of you for hearing testimony about our law enforcement officers and our benefits. This legislation is not only important to us, the survivors, but all of the public safety officers because they know it's only by the grace of God that it's not their name, or a name of a loved one, etched in stone.

I often reflect on what my husband might think if he knew of the struggle's survivors are facing on a daily basis. He didn't become a law enforcement officer for any honors or special recognition. He would tell you he was simply doing his job. What he would want in return for his sacrifice, and the best way to honor him and what he stood for, would be to honor his family and ensure that they are taken care of. Any

public safety officer in Ohio can tell you they simply want to know that should they fall; their spouse and children will be provided for.

This legislation will ensure that Ohio continues to be one of the best states in providing for fallen law enforcement officers' families. The Ohio Death Benefit was enacted in 1976 and the basic wording hasn't changed much since its inception. The amounts of the benefit have never changed, nor the milestone dates within the benefit. It is well past time we update it to ensure that the wishes of a dying officer are granted.

My husband was never granted the choice of how many years of service he would get. That was chosen for him at the hands of a criminal. All planning for our future together was buried with him and I was left alone to navigate life without him. The opportunities for advancement and to make extra income were wiped away with one bullet.

The legislation as currently written will cut my benefit by 50% right at a time when I need it most with 3 kids in college. I am certain he would have entered the DROP program to help with the expenses. But he never got that opportunity. He honored his oath with his life. We ask you to honor him and his ultimate sacrifice by passing the changes within this bill being introduced today.

Another aspect of this legislation is ensuring a very basic need of healthcare, one we all expected would always be provided due to the sacrifice of our spouses. In the near future many survivors will lose these benefits. Many already have.

Law enforcement is a special calling. You don't become a cop for special recognition; there rarely is ever a thank you. You don't become a cop for the good hours, pay, and benefits. You will work a lot of special duty and jump at overtime to provide for your family. You will spend the first half of your career on evening shift. You will miss many of your family dinners, holidays, birthdays, and your kids sporting events. You will endure scrutiny and endless second guessing, you will see the worst society has to offer, you will see things you can never un-see, and you will lose sleep over the people you couldn't help.

The day they took the oath to serve, they vowed they would lay down their lives in service of others. If you ask any police officer, they will tell you the only thing they ask in return is to ensure their family will be provided basic benefits to help pick up the pieces of their shattered lives.