

Hello,

My name is Linda Brentar and I am the surviving spouse of George Brentar, a Euclid police officer who died in the line of duty 11 years ago. On October 10, 2007, while attempting to catch and stop a speeding vehicle on the freeway, George's car hydroplaned on the entrance ramp due to a rainy, slick roadway. The car spun out of control, ultimately striking a pole. Within minutes his cruiser had burst into flames, trapping him inside. Valiant efforts by two off-duty police officers could not help George to escape his car and in the blink of an eye, I lost my husband of 20 years and my children lost their father. George loved what he did for a living, and died protecting the citizens of Euclid where he had worked 22 years.

I am writing to ask for your support of Am. S.B. No. 296 which will update the Ohio Death Benefit act, which has not changed much since its inception in 1976, along with extending state medical benefits to survivors such as myself who are not yet eligible for Medicare.

As I mentioned above, when my husband was killed he had been with the Euclid Police Department for 22 years, which meant that only 3 years after his death my pension benefits were cut by 50%. This came when my children were 13 and 15 years old, meaning they were going to be attending college in the near future. Having those benefits cut was a shock I was not prepared for because I know for a fact that my husband would not have retired at age 52 with two children preparing for college. He always worked any overtime and extra jobs that he could (money we also lost due to his death) and he had already been talking about entering the DROP program when he would have been eligible, which would have given him 8 more years of work before retirement. Am. S.B. No. 296 would address this issue and bring the survivor benefits up-to-date with the times we are in. George was also hoping to be able to move up the ranks in the department, which sadly he never did get a chance to do because of his untimely death.

Another issue that Am. S.B. No 296 would address is allowing survivors such as myself to be able to get state medical benefits until we are eligible for Medicare. At the time of George's death, I was informed that I would not have to worry about health insurance for myself and my family because it would be provided by the Ohio Police & Fire Pension Fund through the Death Benefit Fund. Sadly, I am set to lose these health benefits at the end of the year when the pension fund stops providing medical benefits to me and all other survivors. Since I am not eligible for Medicare for another 10 years, I will have to go onto the Healthcare Marketplace to pick a new insurance. In looking over the choices I have, this new insurance is going to cost me at least twice as much out-of-pocket as what I pay now, with less coverage. All of the options are HMO plans, which mean I am going to have to change doctors, and they all have a huge deductible, which I will have to meet before any coverage begins.

My husband, along with many others, gave his life protecting the citizens of Ohio and my family has had to pay the ultimate price of living every day of our lives without him.

I hope I can count on your support of this bill and a timely passage before the end of the year.

Thank you.

Linda Brentar