

Grace unfortunately can not be here today, but I am including her testimony at the bill introduction on May 3rd. Her words are so powerful, and I thought they should at least be read by the Finance Committee. Here are Grace's words:

...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....

Today I would like to thank each of you for coming to honor our fallen law enforcement officers. As you can see honoring the fallen is very important to the law enforcement family. It is important to them because they know it's only by the grace of God that it's not their name etched in stone upon a memorial wall. Today a long procession of cars will travel to London to pay respects and honor those who have fallen in the line of duty.

Speeches will be given from important people telling us, the survivors, how much they care and appreciate our loved one's service and sacrifice. There will be bagpipes, 21-gun salutes, flags flown proudly, and many tears shed.

A great fear survivors share is that our officers will be forgotten over time. These memorial services are immensely comforting to us. It is a time of bitter sweet reflection, a bit of pride at the honor bestowed upon our officers, and a time to connect with our law enforcement family.

I often reflect on what my husband might think of all of these memorials and services. He would likely be humbled and a bit embarrassed as 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 officer here today 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. 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 was wiped away with one bullet. Saving for the best college, shopping for that prom dress that cost a little extra, or the car dad would help them learn to drive...gone. We learned to live without all the extras.

The benefit as currently written will cut my income by 50% right at a time when I need it most. 3 kids in college is not inexpensive. Tuition is waived, which I am grateful for, but the many costs associated with college are staggering. 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 from the grave 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. Some already have. Some have had to choose between their family and healthcare. Some have had to go to work as the sole parent just to purchase healthcare for their family. The balancing act between raising your family alone and providing healthcare is extremely stressful. One of our survivors has returned to work last year to provide healthcare for her children. She was often left choosing between the demands of her family and the job...meanwhile, the man who murdered her husband is afforded free healthcare in prison, with all of his needs being met.

Her husband always told her if something happened to him she would never have to worry about providing for her kids. If he only knew the stress she faces daily making sure she meets the needs of her children and balances it all with grace and dignity.

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 most likely end up on midnights because that works best to make sure you can coach your kids little league team. You will endure scrutiny, 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. Why would anyone do that to themselves? They do it because it's a part of who they are and their commitment to serve their communities. They are men and women of great honor and pride. At the end of the day they might have helped a couple of people or made a bit of a difference. The day they walked out of the academy they vowed they would lay down their lives for you, for their community, for Ohio if the time ever came.

If you ask any of these cops 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.....Our husbands honored their vow to you, today we ask you to honor their dying wish.

Grace Leon

Surviving Spouse of Wayne Leon