

Honorable Committee Members:

On December 5<sup>th</sup>, 1997, my husband Cincinnati Police Officer Daniel Pope was gunned down in the line of duty. My life changed that day forever. He was delivering a domestic violence warrant and the perpetrator shot both him and his partner, Cincinnati Police Specialist Ron Jeter, in the head and left them for dead. Both died as a result of the gunshot.

I had never known another police officer who had been killed in the line of duty. But that was about to change. I became involved with an organization who not only honored my fallen police officer but helped me to rebuild my shattered life. That organization is Concerns of Police Survivors, Inc. (C.O.P.S.). At the time of Dan's death, there was no chapter association in Ohio, so after I started to come out of the darkness of my life, I chartered the Ohio C.O.P.S. chapter.

After Ohio Concerns of Police Survivors was up and running, I was honored when survivors let me in to their lives to be of assistance to them after their officer had fallen. Our mission was simple: help them pick up the pieces of their shattered lives and assist with tools to help rebuild their life without their fallen officer.

One of the missions of assisting survivors is make sure the benefits they received are sufficient to let them become both mom and dad to the children of those who died. And SB296 will certainly make this a reality for so many.

Senate Bill 296 will bring much needed changes to the Ohio Death Benefit, the benefit that that was enacted back in 1976 to support and take care of Ohio's public safety officers. It was intended to support the families of those who died making the ultimate sacrifice for the citizens of their communities and the great state of Ohio. Selfless acts of bravery, putting their lives before others, was what they did. And they died heroically, while leaving behind spouses and children to figure out how to live life without them.

The Ohio Death Benefit has seen no significant changes to the milestones within the law since it's inception. What this legislation does is extremely substantial. Instead of survivors receiving 100% of the deceased officers' death benefits only until that officer reached the very first eligible date of retirement which is 25/48, a solution is to pay survivors 100% of the death benefit all the way through to a full retirement which is 33/70. At that point of retirement, the benefit will then be raised to 75%. This also has the possibility to fix the DROP (Deferred Retirement Option Program) situation. Some of the reasons for these changes:

- Our officers' have suffered the greatest loss possible with their lives. There is no greater disability than death. This is also the argument for increasing our benefit post retirement to the 75% rate.
- Our officers' opportunity for promotion within their departments has been eliminated with their death. With the median age of fallen officers' being around 40, there is much that they never got to realize.

- Our officers never had the opportunity to work extra shifts, attend court, receive vacation time or sick leave, and accumulate comp time. This amount of money for officers working today adds great value to their base pay amounts. These things are never even taken into consideration with the benefit survivors receive.
- With the DROP program, many officers are able to add drastically to their retirement. Our officers never had the opportunity to sign onto DROP.
- Quite a few of our fallen officers are already enrolled in DROP. By pushing the retirement limit up, here is a very important reason to change that retirement date; with the DROP program, these officers are putting in on average 33 years, up to the maximum that they could work before hitting the maximum age requirement of 70 years. As it stands now, those surviving spouses on DROP death benefits, come right out of the gate receiving 50% of the death benefit. By pushing that retirement age up to the max, those surviving spouses would then receive 100% until 33 years, possibly solving the problems DROP has encountered with the death benefit. There would be no need to pay these survivors any differently than survivors whose officers were still working towards full retirement.
- Most survivors are dropped by the end of the month of their officers' death from any health care coverage. While some departments have picked up their survivors, the majority of survivors must fund health care on their own.
- Most officers' who die at the median age of 40 have children. While Ohio does have in state tuition paid for, only the cost of tuition is paid. The surviving spouse still shoulders the cost of food, housing, books and all other miscellaneous costs associated with college. And by the time those children are going to college, most Social Security payments have ceased. And not all children are eligible for Social Security. It depends upon how much the officer paid in. Many departments have their own retirement systems, and if the officer did not work enough quarters prior to becoming a police officer, those children do not receive any Social Security benefits.
- Most surviving spouses are women. Most have children. By the time those children are going off to college, Social Security stops, and with many, their death benefit check will be cut in half at the officer's retirement eligibility date. For many of them, they have lived the difficult life of raising those children alone and have chosen not to work so they can do the job of both parents. About the time their kids go off to school, their income is reduced to the amount of almost poverty level.

Many people we have spoken to about this law change believe that moving that retirement age of our fallen to the later retirement possibility, several things will be accomplished. They are:

- It would secure the survivor of the fallen to not be pushed into losing one half of their income at that earliest date. This would compensate somewhat for the inability to see promotions, added income from court time, comp time, vacation, sick, etc., that the officer never had the opportunity to earn.
- It would also help those surviving spouses who have surviving children entering college, giving them the extra years and money to help see those children graduate.
- And it could help address the DROP situation.
- Allowing survivors to enroll in the state health care system would guarantee those family will not lose their insurance. Most survivors in Ohio will lose health care by 2019.

We are grateful for all we have received. We are hoping these changes to law will be enacted by the end of 2018. The law has basically not changed in 42 years. We survivors are hoping and praying that bills introduced in the Senate and the House will update this legislation to better take care of our fallen public safety officers, as they have given the ultimate sacrifice with their lives.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda Pope

Surviving Spouse of Daniel J. Pope

E.O.W. 12/5/1997