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House Government Operations Committee  
State of Vermont  
Room 49  
115 State Street  
Montpelier, VT 05633-5301

Dear Representative Copeland-Hanzas and Members of the House Government Operations Committee,

In 2003, my role in Vermont Law Enforcement changed dramatically. Two Police Officers died in the line of duty, Vermont State Trooper Sgt. Michael Johnson and Essex County Deputy Sheriff Ruby Ann Rainault. While I did not know these Officers personally, it brought to life a very real possibility. The possibility at the end of the day I might not go home to my family. The following year, 2004, when both Officers were added to the Roll Call at the National Law Enforcement Officer's Memorial I knew I had to be there. Not only to show support for the fallen but to remind myself just what is at stake every time I pin my badge to my chest. For the past 9 years I have made the yearly trek to Washington D.C. during National Police Week with the Police Unity Tour. The Police Unity Tour is a group of Law Enforcement Officers who raise money to support the National Law Enforcement Officer's Memorial Fund by riding our bicycles 300 miles from New Jersey to Washington D.C. Because of the Police Unity Tour, I have met and am proud to call many of those involved in the Police Unity Tour my friends and my family.

A good friend of mine approached me in 2014 to become the New England COPS (Concerns of Police Survivors) representative for the State of Vermont. After some thought, I applied for, and was chosen to represent Vermont. The job has not been easy and the learning curve has been huge. Without the support of my peers, friends, family, and my extended family in emergency services, the task would be daunting at best. But a simple statement describing COPS from Patti Wolf, Sgt. Michael Johnson's sister, made my commitment steadfast, "This is the greatest bunch of people you never wanted to meet." This is a group comprised of families who have lost a loved one in the line of duty. Unfortunately the only way to join this group is to become a survivor, to have lost a loved one who is protecting and serving our communities.

While at a Conference sponsored by COPS, I was shocked to find Vermont does not offer State Level Public Safety Officer's Benefits (PSOB) to Vermont Law Enforcement. The current law is a testament to the support our brethren in the Fire Service and Emergency Medical Services across the state receive. Without these professionals in the Volunteer and Paid services, the citizens of Vermont would be at a great risk. However, now it is time to include the professionals in Law Enforcement and Corrections to the list.

Upon return to Vermont, I contacted Representative Michael Yantachka of Charlotte. I expressed my concern of the lack of State Benefit for Law Enforcement, which currently existed for both Fire Fighters and Emergency Medical Providers. The law currently provides \$50,000.00 dollars to any Fire Fighter or Emergency Medical Provider who dies in the line of duty. Representative Yantachka contacted several other Representatives and discovered Law Enforcement had not been included in the bill because many of the municipalities around the State offered life insurance for the Officers.



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September 17, 2015 is a day I will not soon forget. After providing an escort to a bicycle ride sponsored by New England COPS to the Vermont Emergency Services Memorial, the news of Trooper Kyle Young's death was brought to my attention. This event brought to fruition the moment we in Vermont Law Enforcement had been dreading, the loss of one of our own. The men and women of Vermont Law Enforcement came together to support the families of Trooper Young and honored Trooper Young for his years of dedication to protecting the Citizens of Vermont.

The Federal Government PSOB currently provides \$359,316.00 for eligible deaths and disabilities occurring on or after October 1, 2015, to the families of fallen Police, Fire, and Rescue personnel. While this may seem like a staggering number it needs to be taken in context. The money the family receives will never replace a fallen loved one. The money will not tuck the children into bed, or replace the fallen officer at school events, or even walk a daughter down the aisle. What the money will do is make sure the children of the fallen officer are taken care of; ultimately providing the family with a stable income in the future for housing, clothing, education and other basic needs.

By adding a Vermont State Benefit for Law Enforcement, the families of the Fallen can rest assured money is available to them make an already difficult situation a little bit easier. There are currently 25 Police Officers, 47 Firefighters, 9 Correctional Officers and 7 EMS Personnel whom have died in the line of duty protecting the State of Vermont. All of these brave professionals left us prematurely doing what they loved. It is incumbent upon us to make sure the families of those who have lost a loved one are taken care of. For this reason, I am asking the Honorable Members of the House Government Operations Committee to move this important legislation forward.

Respectfully Submitted,

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