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BOARD SPOTLIGHT

By Zach Lewis, Past President



The Iowa State Police Association (ISPA) once again was represented in Washington, D.C., during National Police Week. President Todd Thoeming and First Vice President Tim Pillack were sent to our nation's capital to participate in lobbying efforts alongside the National Association of Police Organizations (NAPO). In addition to our lobbying efforts, ISPA wanted to pay our respects and honor the men and women who have paid the ultimate sacrifice protecting their communities. Between October 2015 and November 2016, we lost six officers in the line of duty here in Iowa. We, as a board and as friends of the fallen, felt it was important to attend the events during National Police Week, especially the 29th Annual Candlelight Vigil. So, Dave McFarland, Josh Bell, Matt Harkin and I piled into a minivan and made the 1,000-mile trek to D.C.

During the candlelight vigil, Adam Liddle, Susan Farrell, Carlos Puente-Morales, Shawn Miller, Anthony Beminio and Justin Martin all had their names read during the ceremony as those who were added to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial. Also added to the memorial wall were several other officers who had what were finally deemed as line-of-duty deaths; one of whom was David Bowen. More than 20,000 people came to the National Mall to attend the vigil.

Since we traveled all that way in a minivan, the four of us thought we might as well crash the meetings Thoeming and Pillack were attending with our elected officials. The House of Representative was in recess, so we met with the offices of Reps. Dave Loebsack, Steve King and Rod Blum. We were able to meet with Rep. David Young and Sens. Joni Ernst and Charles Grassley. The following are the topics we discussed with them.



Thin Blue Line Act (H.R. 115)

The Thin Blue Line Act would make the targeting, attempted killing or killing of a police officer, firefighter or first responder an aggravating factor in death penalty determinations in federal court. This would be applicable whether they were targeted or murdered on duty because of the performance of their duty or because of their status as a public official. The only requirement is that the homicide provide federal jurisdiction.

1033 Program

The repeal or reversal of President Obama's Executive Order 13688, which severely limited state and local law enforcement's access to lifesaving surplus military equipment through the Department of Defense 1033 Program and various grant programs through the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security. The executive order not only restricted law enforcement's access to this equipment, but it placed onerous and unnecessary training and reporting requirements on this equipment.

Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) Improvement Act (S. 419)

This act will tackle the issues of transparency and the timeliness of case determinations within the PSOB program and protect the ability of survivors, disabled officers and their families to get the benefits they so rightly deserve. Importantly, this act will return the PSOB program to a presumptive benefit and restore the "substantial weight" standard that requires PSOB to give substantial weight to the findings of federal, state, and local agencies as to the cause of the public safety officer's death or disability. It will ensure that children of fallen or disabled public safety officers will still be eligible for education benefits if an adjudication delay causes them to age out of benefit eligibility before their claim is approved. It will increase transparency through weekly and quarterly public reports on the status of claims.

On May 17, 2017, in a major victory for National Association of Police Organizations (NAPO) and public safety officers across the country, Congress unanimously passed the Public Safety Officers' Benefits Improvement Act (S. 419), a bipartisan bill sponsored by Sens. Charles Grassley (R-IA) and Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY).

Government Pension Offset and Windfall Elimination Provision Reform

The Government Pension Offset (GPO) reduces public employees' Social Security spousal or survivor benefit by two-thirds of their public pension, and often leads to negative effects on law enforcement officers' retirements. If a spouse who paid into Social Security dies, the surviving public safety officer would normally be eligible for half of the deceased's benefit. However, if the surviving law enforcement officer had not been paying into Social Security while working, the GPO requires that this amount be offset by two-thirds of the survivor's pension, eliminating most, or all of the payment. Because of their profession, many law enforcement officers do not pay into Social Security; however, if they had not served at all, they would receive the full allotment of the spouse's benefit.

In addition to the GPO, public safety employees are also adversely affected by the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP). Although most law enforcement officers retire after a specific length of service, usually while in their early to mid-50s, many look for new opportunities to serve their communities. Yet, when they retire from a non-Social Security paying job and move to one that does pay into Social Security, they are penalized by the WEP. Instead of receiving their rightfully earned Social Security retirement benefit, their pension heavily offsets it, thus vastly reducing the amount they receive.

GPO and WEP were intended to be “leveling” responses, but only serve to hurt public safety officers. Nine out of 10 public employees affected by the GPO lose their entire spousal benefit, even though their spouses paid Social Security for many years. The WEP causes hard-working public safety officers to lose the benefits they earned themselves, thus punishing those who selflessly serve and protect our communities.

All our elected officials and their staffs were welcoming and receptive to our issues, and we thank them for the time they spent discussing our legislative priorities. National Police Week is always a great time. It is a truly awesome and humbling experience to stand on the National Mall to honor the fallen. I would encourage everyone to attend. I would recommend that you fly, but those tales are never to be written about. Stay safe.