

COVER PAGE

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Support Local Law Enforcement”**

Testimony

National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives (NOBLE)

Before the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Homeland

Security

Wednesday, May 15, 2024

Chairman, Congressman Mark Green MD, Ranking Member,
Congressman Bennie Thompson, and committee members, I bring you
greetings on behalf of the Executive Board, members, and constituents
of the National Organization of Black Law Enforcement Executives –
NOBLE.

My name is Rodney Bryant, and I am the National President. NOBLE
serves as the conscience of law enforcement by being committed to
Justice by Action. NOBLE has 58 chapters and represents over 4,500
members worldwide that consist of chief executive officers and
command-level law enforcement officials from federal, state, county,
municipal law enforcement agencies, and criminal justice practitioners.

I have served more than 35 years in the law enforcement profession in various positions of increasing responsibility to include serving as patrol officer, senior police, sergeant, lieutenant, assistant commander, major, and as the 25th chief of the Atlanta Police Department. It is an honor for NOBLE to provide written testimony on the topic of “Standing Strong on the Thin Blue Line: How Congress Can Support Local Law Enforcement.”

I would be remiss if I did not recognize that this week is National Police Week where we honor and remember those law enforcement officers who have made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty. In 2023, approximately 136 officers died in the line of duty representing a 40% reduction compared to 2022. However, one officer lost is one too many. NOBLE will continue to stand vigilant and in solidarity with law enforcement in efforts to reduce this statistic. We invite Congress to join us in this “NOBLE” pursuit.

On April 29th, our nation experienced the deadliest attack against U.S. law enforcement officers since 2016. An AR-15 semi-automatic rifle and a 40-caliber handgun were deployed in a Charlotte, NC shooting that resulted in four law enforcement officers being killed and wounding four others. I extend heartfelt prayers and condolences to the officers' families, agencies, and affected communities. NOBLE is very concerned about the level of gun violence in the United States, and specifically the correlation between violence and the proliferation of assault weapons and high-capacity ammunition magazines. It is our organization's opinion that violence—particularly gun violence is a public health issue. And, as with all public health issues, it demands a comprehensive, nonjudgmental, pragmatic, evidence-based approach to saving lives and reducing injury.

A positive step towards addressing the level of gun violence in our nation was taken with the passage of the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act. NOBLE supported this legislation. The bill combined gun safety legislation with mental health and school security resources.

Bipartisan Safer Communities Act Highlights:

- Increases funding and improves mental health, school safety, crisis intervention and anti-violence programs.
- Requires tougher background checks for younger gun buyers, those who are deemed a risk in certain cases, and closes the so-called “boyfriend loophole,” barring intimate partners who have been convicted of domestic violence crimes against their significant other from having a gun even if they don’t live together.
- We at NOBLE recommend that in addition to the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, that Congress, the Law Enforcement Profession, and communities across this nation work to secure the passage of bi-partisan legislation that will at minimum address the following:
 - Mandate Universal Background Checks
 - Ban Assault Weapons
 - Ban High-Capacity Magazines

- Mandate Safe Gun Storage
- Relaxation of Gun Laws such as Permitless Carry which exist in 29 states. It is NOBLE's belief and many in our profession that the continued relaxation of gun laws poses a real danger to law enforcement officers and the community.
- Key Statistics
 - 2023 Mass Shootings – Approximately 656 Mass Shootings
 - Firearms Number #1 Killer of Children (ages 1-17)
 - In 2023, Firearms-related officer deaths accounted for 35% of the 136 officers killed in the line of duty.
 - Studies have shown that officers are significantly more likely to be fatally shot in states with weaker gun laws and higher levels of gun ownership.

It is my opinion that the law enforcement profession is in need of comprehensive federal legislation such as the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act. NOBLE did support the Biden Administration's Executive Order on Advancing Effective, Accountable Policing and Criminal Justice Practices to Enhance Public Trust and Public Safety. There are key elements in the order that we feel are reasonable and actionable such as accountability, workforce support, use-of-force, and resource support for mental / behavioral health services. Our organization recommends to Congress a bi-partisan effort to find common ground on a very basic constitutional right within the 14th Amendment – Equal Protection Under The Law. For many parts of our society, citizens have not felt equally protected by a key American institution, law enforcement. In many communities of color, the first names of unarmed citizens that were killed by officers, who took an oath to protect and serve, resonate today and for generations to come. Their names are Tamir, Eric, Breonna, George, to name a few.

Lastly, I appeal to our congressional leaders of both parties to continue to support our federal law enforcement agencies in the areas of funding, public support, and policies that ensure that they maintain their readiness. It is critical that federal law enforcement resources are available to support state, county, local, and tribal law enforcement agencies. There must be a unified congressional understanding of the importance of ensuring Homeland Security for our nation which equates to strengthening all levels of public safety.

On behalf of the law enforcement leaders and constituents of NOBLE, I thank you for supporting our profession and our ability to maintain public safety. Our members stand ready to meet the needs of our communities and nation. Thank you again for this opportunity to provide testimony.