

2026 HONORED OFFICERS // P. 16

FOP JOURNAL



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MAY 2026

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NATIONAL POLICE WEEK

MAY 10-16

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Hey, Congress: Do Your Job

// **WRITE TO US!** If you have further questions, contact Patrick Yoes at (504) 234-4300, or pyoes@nationalfop.org.

Protecting Our Homeland Never Stops — Neither Should the Paychecks

For more than a century, the Fraternal Order of Police has stood as the voice of America's law enforcement officers, men and women who do not have the luxury of delay, dysfunction or indecision. They show up, they do their jobs and they face the risks. It is not unreasonable to expect the same level of commitment from those elected to serve in the United States Congress.

Yet today, we are once again confronted with a troubling reality: a prolonged failure to properly fund the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, including critical components like U.S. Customs and Border Protection and U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement.

For nearly 70 days, political gridlock has delayed action on agencies essential to our national security. At a time when threats to our nation are escalating and our security posture remains elevated, this kind of inaction is not just frustrating; it is dangerous.

Law enforcement officers assigned to border security and immigration enforcement are already operating in complex, high-risk environments. They do not have the option of stepping back while Congress debates. They do not get to postpone their responsibilities until the political climate improves. Every day, they continue to enforce our laws, safeguard our communities and protect our nation's sovereignty, often without the certainty that their missions are being fully supported.

The Senate has taken an

important first step by passing a budget resolution to begin the reconciliation process. While that path is not simple, it offers a way to move beyond partisan stalemate and deliver the funding that DHS so urgently needs. The responsibility now rests with the House of Representatives to act, swiftly and decisively.

**For nearly 70 days,
political gridlock
has delayed
action on agencies
essential to our
national security.**

We support the efforts of Speaker Mike Johnson to advance the Senate-passed resolution without modification. Any delay or revision risks sending the process backward, jeopardizing both the timeline and the outcome. The goal is clear: complete the reconciliation process and deliver a final bill to President Donald Trump for signature by June 1.

The estimated funding requirement, approximately \$70 billion through fiscal year 2029, reflects what is needed to sustain operations, enhance capabilities and ensure that our federal law enforcement agencies can effectively carry out their mission. Anything less risks undermining officer safety

and national security. Protecting our homeland never stops — neither should the paychecks of those tasked with this responsibility.

This is not about politics; it is about responsibility.

The appropriations process has increasingly become a battleground for broader policy disputes. While debate is part of our system, it cannot come at the expense of those who stand on the front lines. When funding is delayed, the consequences are real.

They are felt by the agent working a remote stretch of border in the middle of the night.

They are felt by the officer responding to intelligence on transnational criminal activity.

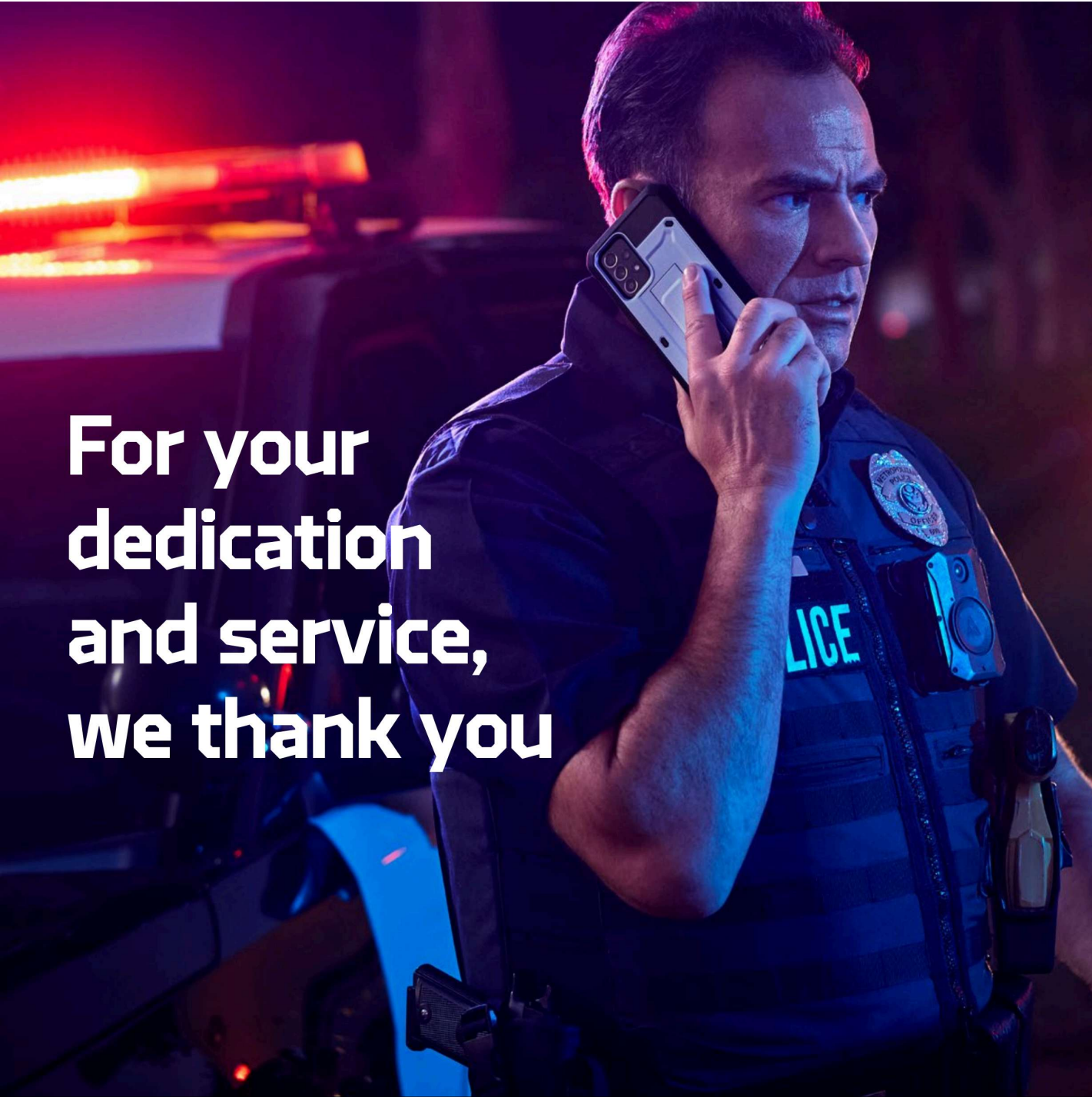
They are felt by every law enforcement professional who depends on the resources, training and support to do the job safely and effectively.

Congressional gridlock may be nothing new, but the stakes continue to rise. The threats facing our nation are evolving, becoming more complex and more dangerous. Our response must be equally strong, and it begins with ensuring that those on the front lines have what they need.

The men and women of law enforcement have upheld their oath. They continue to meet every challenge with courage and professionalism.

It is time for Congress to do the same.

The message is simple, direct and long overdue: Do your job. **FOP**



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// **WRITE TO US!** If you have further questions, contact Jimmy Holderfield at (904) 813-0067, or jholderfield@nationalfop.org.

Greetings, my sisters and brothers. I hope this May edition of the *Journal* finds you healthy and safe. We just finished our National Spring Board of Trustees and State Presidents meetings in Anaheim, California. California State President Roger Hilton and his team did an outstanding job organizing the meetings and hosting us with great hospitality. Many presentations were made that will enhance the experience of our members. One program is the Gratitude Initiative, an organization that has raised funds for children of active military personnel and veterans to attend college preparatory programs free of

charge. Another approved service centers on the fentanyl epidemic. Look for more information in the coming weeks and months.

Speaking of member benefits, our National Benefits Committee is conducting a complete review of our current program. They have established strict criteria with a two-part goal: providing value to FOP members and delivering a financial benefit to the National FOP. Under the leadership of Chairman Jack Simington, National trustee from Washington state, three categories for vendor classification have been created. Category 1 is strictly a member benefit with no financial benefit

to the NFOP. Category 2 provides a member benefit with a minor financial benefit to the NFOP. Category 3 offers a member benefit with a major financial benefit to the NFOP, such as Amazon Business and CrossCountry Mortgage. The committee is actively seeking new vendors to better serve our members.


One of the most important issues discussed by the National Board of Trustees was the membership database system. As I have reported in every *Journal* message for the past three and a half years, we have been working on a state-of-the-art system

Continued on page 12 >

Support the NFOP PAC!

We need your support of the National Fraternal Order of Police Political Action Committee (NFOP PAC), which, like our grassroots activism, is an essential part of our National Legislative Program. The NFOP PAC allows us to support candidates who support our members and our profession. As the oldest and largest law enforcement labor organization in the United States, it is crucial we keep our PAC strong, so we can help the candidates who not only support our members but the entire law enforcement community. It is up to us to ensure that they get elected!

We need to increase member participation in our payroll deduction and monthly recurring credit card programs. Please help us advocate on your behalf and do so with the resources needed to be effective. Help us grow our PAC and amplify our voice in the nation's capital.



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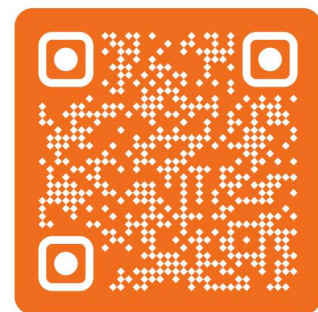


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Grant assistance opportunities are available through Police1 for agencies that qualify.



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SECRETARY'S MESSAGE

Continued from page 10 >

to better serve our members. We were blessed to bring on board Mark Hong as our NFOP IT consultant. Hong is the founder and owner of Rise Technologies, and his background includes serving as chief engineer for Amazon.

What Hong and ACGI — the IT company we contracted with to build our new system — taught us was that “we didn’t know what we didn’t know.” As development and production of the Association Anywhere membership database system progressed and feedback was received from various state and local lodges after the “go live” on September 1, we realized we needed much more than the basics. We worked daily with engineers to correct the issues and learned that local and state lodge secretaries were having to preform “workarounds” to complete basic membership and per capita functions. These workarounds are not acceptable; the system should be user-friendly without requiring manipulation across programs.

We also learned that fixing these issues would require additional “scope of work” add-ons at an estimated cost of \$90,000 and nearly a year to complete. Fortunately, Hong has already been developing a membership database system, named Ortu3, for several of our state lodges. We used Ortu3 this year to process per capita

and issue membership cards; without it, we would not have been able to do so.

I reported this to our National Board of Trustees, and Hong and I provided a demonstration of the system. Many questions, answers, comments and suggestions were offered. Rise

If you are unable to attend the National Peace Officers’ Memorial Service, please pause for a moment and remember those taken from us.

Technologies submitted a proposal that delivers the system we need, allows for future expansion and comes at a better cost. It’s a win-win all around, with our members as the beneficiaries. The National Board of Trustees approved the proposal unanimously. Our plan is to phase in

the 2,300 local and 48 state lodges over the next three months, with one-third beginning in May. For those who have inquired about digital membership cards, we are now able to offer them, though we are still working through some logistical issues. I want to thank every member for your patience during this development and transition. Know that the challenges we have endured will result in a better product in the future.

May is always a sad month for me — not because it’s my birth month and I’m getting older, but because it’s national law enforcement officer memorial month. Don’t get me wrong, it’s the highest honor for me, along with you, to show our respect to our fallen brothers and sisters and to support the survivors. It just saddens me that the criminal element has taken the lives of so many great women and men, leaving behind widows, widowers and children. I get sad, and then angry, when I think about it. May 15 at 12 noon (EST) is the date and time for the National Peace Officers’ Memorial Service. Please remember our brothers and sisters on that date and time. If you are unable to attend the service in person, please pause for a moment and remember those taken from us, and give thanks for your blessings.

In closing, please let me know if I or my staff can help you with anything. Be safe. **FOP**

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SOUTH DAKOTA

The Spirit of Su Award: SD FOP Supports a Lasting Legacy in High School Basketball

TRAVIS GUTZMER /
SOUTH DAKOTA STATE LODGE
PRESIDENT

“True Greatness Is Found Not Only in Victory, But in Virtue”

Every March, as crowds fill arenas across South Dakota for the high school state basketball tournaments, the energy is unmistakable. Bands play, student sections roar and communities rally around their teams in pursuit of a championship. Yet amid the intensity of competition, one of the most meaningful moments of the tournament has nothing to do with the scoreboard.

At halftime of each state championship game, play pauses to honor something far greater than athletic achievement. It is then that the Spirit of Su Award is presented, a tribute to character, leadership, academic excellence and community service. Sponsored by the Fraternal Order of Police, the plaque stands as one of the most respected honors in South Dakota high school athletics.

The Legacy of SuAnne Big Crow

The award is named in honor of SuAnne Big Crow, a young woman whose life and legacy continue to inspire generations. A standout player from the Pine Ridge Reservation, she was admired not only for her talent on the basketball court, but for her leadership, humility and dedication to her community.

In 1992, during her senior year, SuAnne tragically lost her life in an automobile accident while traveling to accept a prestigious basketball honor. Her passing deeply affected communities across the state. In response, coaches, educators and civic leaders established the Spirit of Su Award in 1994 to ensure her legacy would endure.

More Than a Basketball Award

While presented during the state



Captain Josh Phillips of the Minnehaha County Sheriff's Office and Officer Skyler Mathis of the Sioux Falls Police Department, along with Sioux Falls School Board member Dawn Marie Johnson and her daughter, had the honor of presenting the Spirit of Su Award to Devin Buehler of Hill City during the South Dakota 2025 state tournament.

basketball tournaments, the Spirit of Su Award is not a most valuable player trophy. It recognizes senior student athletes who exemplify excellence in athletics, commitment to academics, leadership among peers and meaningful service to their communities.

Recipients represent schools from all classifications across South Dakota. At each championship tournament, thousands rise in applause as honorees are introduced at center court. The ceremonial star quilt, a symbol of honor, unity and cultural respect, is traditionally presented by members of SuAnne Big Crow's family or representatives connected to the Spirit of Su organization. This personal presentation reinforces the cultural significance of the award and connects today's athletes directly to SuAnne's enduring legacy.

The Fraternal Order of Police: Investing in Youth

The sponsorship of the Spirit of Su Award trophies by the Fraternal Order of Police reflects the organization's commitment to strengthening communities through leadership, service and integrity. Law enforcement officers understand the importance of positive role models

and mentorship in shaping young lives.

By supporting this award, the FOP reinforces values that extend beyond athletics, such as personal responsibility, service before self, respect for others and dedication to community well-being.

A Living Tribute

More than three decades after its creation, the Spirit of Su Award remains one of the most meaningful honors in South Dakota high school athletics. Each recipient carries forward a legacy rooted in character and service.

For the Fraternal Order of Police, continuing to sponsor this award is both an honor and a responsibility. It reflects a belief that strong communities begin with strong character, and that recognizing young people who embody that character helps shape a brighter future for South Dakota.

As championship trophies are awarded and nets are cut down each March, the Spirit of Su Award reminds communities that the true measure of success is not simply points on a scoreboard, but the impact one leaves on others.

And that is a legacy worth celebrating. **FOP**

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HONORING FALLEN HEROES

NATIONAL POLICE WEEK 2026



Tens of thousands of law enforcement officers, survivors and supporters from across the country will travel to the nation's capital May 10–16 to attend National Police Week ceremonies and other events. They gather to remember the courage and dedication of federal, state, county, municipal, military, tribal and campus officers

who gave their lives in the line of duty and to support the loved ones they left behind.

During the 45th annual National Peace Officers' Memorial Service on May 15, the National FOP and National FOP Auxiliary will pay tribute to the 191 fallen heroes listed here. May their heroic service and sacrifice never be forgotten. **FOP**

ALABAMA

Mark Meadows
Shawn Nixon

ARIZONA

Shawn Braaten*
Gabriel Facio
John Wing*

CALIFORNIA

Joshua Byrd
Timothy Corlew
Lauren Craven
Hector Cuevas Jr.
Shiou Deng
Joshua Kelley-Eklund
Victor Lemus
Andrew Nunez
William Osborn
Samuel Riveros
Osmar Rodarte-Paez
Alec Sanders
Jason Zdunich*

DELAWARE

Sayer Evans*
Dennis Kelly*
Matthew Snook

FLORIDA

Brendan Arlington*
Alton Berrian
David Cajuso
Jeremy Cassady
Craig Gaines
Devin Jaramillo
Andres Lahera
William May
Alan Reffsin*
Terri Sweeting-Mashkow

GEORGIA

Stephen Campisi*
Helio Garcia III
Mitchell Georgiana*
Jeremy Labonte
David Rose
Brandon Sikes

HAWAII

Suzanne O

ILLINOIS

Jeffrey Friedlieb*
Timothy Jones
Krystal Rivera

INDIANA

Blake Reynolds
John Stahl III

IOWA

Joseph Morgan*

KANSAS

Brandon Gaede
Scott Heimann
Elijah Ming
Quintin Silsby*
Hunter Simoncic

KENTUCKY

George Ramirez

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Marc Brock
Grant Candies
Allen Credeur Jr.
Caleb Eisworth
Charles Riley

MARYLAND

Edward Ivey Jr.*
Brenda Lowery*

MASSACHUSETTS

Joshua Kingsley*

MICHIGAN

Rhonda Morris
Kelvin Patrick
Shannon Wright*

MINNESOTA

Jesse Branch*
Felicia Reilly
Cory Slifko*

MISSISSIPPI

Joshua Brashears
Bryan Pippin*
Martin Shields Jr.

MISSOURI

Myron Downey*
Henry Franklin
Eddie Mays
Andrew Wachter*

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 James Becker*
 Philip Cammarata*
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 Vincent Caruana*
 Maruja Clark*
 Gerard Connors*
 Abraham Cruz III
 Frank Debenedetto*
 Joseph Esposito*
 Robert Fawcett*
 Patrick Franzone
 Dennis Gallagher*
 Steven Greene
 Richard Handibode Jr.*
 Kevin Hanley*
 Thomas Herrick

Didarul Islam
 Denise Jones*
 Timothy Keane
 William Krupa*
 Norman Kunze*
 David LaJoie*
 Marc Lotter*
 Bret Martin*
 William McCabe*
 Michael McEntee*
 David Miller Jr.*
 Jeffrey Montenegro*
 Albert Morabito*
 James Motto Sr.
 Joseph Murray Jr.
 Raymond Newcomb
 Robert Nobile*
 Kevin Nuckel*
 Mark Ondus
 Joseph Panarese*
 Michael Pisano*
 Robert Porfert
 David Portalatin*
 Kathleen Radziunas
 Robert Ranno*

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Photos by David L. Stevens



Photos by David L. Stevens

HONORING FALLEN HEROES

Continued from page 17 >

- Steven Ringe*
- Sandro Rizzotti*
- Frederick Scheidt Jr.
- Annmarie Smith*
- Michael Snell
- Richard Teemsma*
- James Vanacore
- Alfredo Varela*
- Dennis Vitelli
- Clarence Word III*

NORTH CAROLINA

- Francisco Flattes II
- Mark Laskowski*
- Roger Smith

OHIO

- Nicholas Cayton
- Larry Henderson Jr.
- John Radabaugh*
- Weston D. Sherrer
- Marc Wagner*
- Phillip Wagner

OKLAHOMA

- Meagan Burke*
- Thomas Duran
- Clint Lawrence
- Steven Rozell*

PENNSYLVANIA

- Mark Baker
- Cody Becker
- Andrew Duarte
- Isaiah Emenheiser

RHODE ISLAND

- Richard Carchia*

SOUTH CAROLINA

- Nathaniel Ansay
- Devin F. Mason
- Mark Reynolds*
- Dennis Ricks Jr.
- Michael Wood*

TENNESSEE

- Justin Mowery

TEXAS

- Jerry Adamick Jr.
- Mark Butler
- Gary Crawford*
- Ruben Garcia*
- John Hamm*
- Timothy Hatch*
- Jessie Perez
- Melissa Pollard
- Alex Roberts
- Jesus Vargas
- Jonathan White Jr.

UTAH

- Eric Estrada
- Lee Sorensen

VIRGINIA

- Cameron Girvin
- Donald Gotthardt Jr.
- Jeremy Hall
- Christopher Reese

WASHINGTON

- Tara-Marysa Guting
- Kenneth Salas
- Sunny Taylor*

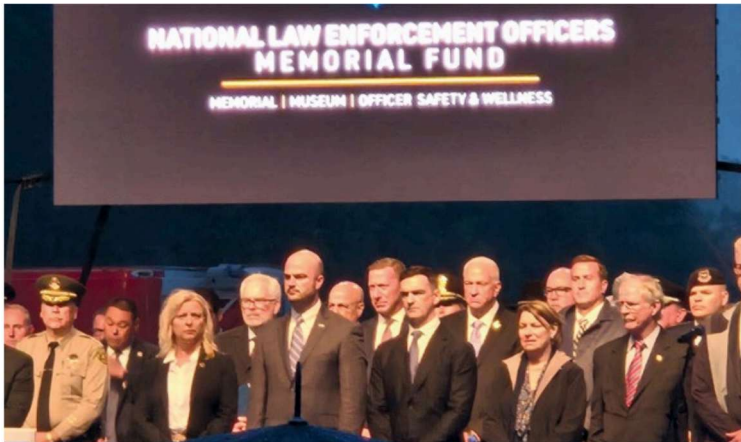
WISCONSIN

- Kendall Corder
- Theodore Fondrk*
- Joshua LaForge*

FEDERAL

- Sarah Beckstrom
- Bruce Bennett*
- Jonathan Campos
- Eric Cespedes
- Marc Fischer*
- Donald Kleber*
- David Maland
- Michael Rice*
- Todd Spiker*
- Dennis Wagner Jr.

*The officer's death occurred in a previous year but has now been officially recognized as a line-of-duty death.



Photos by National Secretary Jimmy Holderfield



National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund/NLEOMF.org

National Police Week

MAY 5 **Annual Blue Mass**

St. Patrick Catholic Church
(downtown D.C.); 12:10 p.m.

MAY 9 **National Police Week 5K**

Arlington, VA. Registration begins at 7 a.m.; race starts at 9 a.m. tinyurl.com/2026-NPW5K.

MAY 11 **National Police K-9 Memorial Service**

National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial;
1 p.m. tinyurl.com/K-9-Memorial-Service-2026.

MAY 11-14 **Police Week Tent City Takeover**

Solace Outpost and HQO Events — Navy Yard.
Presented by D.C. FOP State Lodge and FirstNet.
tinyurl.com/2026-Police-Week-Tent-City.

MAY 12 **Police Unity Tour Bike Ride-In and Ceremony**

National Law Enforcement Officers
Memorial; 2 p.m. policeunitytour.com.

Law Enforcement United Arrival Ceremony

Location and time TBD. leunited.org.

Honor Guard and Police Unity Tour Reception

National Law Enforcement Museum;
7 p.m. Registration required. [tinyurl.com/
Honor-Guard-Reception-2026](https://tinyurl.com/Honor-Guard-Reception-2026).

MAY 13 **Shomrim Society Jewish Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Service**

National Law Enforcement Officers
Memorial; 10 a.m.

38th Annual Candlelight Vigil

National Mall; 8 p.m. [NLEOMF.org/
event/38th-annual-candlelight-vigil](https://NLEOMF.org/event/38th-annual-candlelight-vigil).

MAY 14
Annual Steve Young
Honor Guard and Pipe Band Tribute

U.S. Capitol Reflecting Pool; 9 a.m.
policeweekhonorguard.com.

Police Vehicle Display

U.S. Capitol Reflecting Pool; 1 p.m.
tinyurl.com/Police-Vehicle-Display-2026.

Law Enforcement Emerald Societies
Annual Memorial March

Capitol Hill; 6 p.m. [nclees.org/
memorial-march-and-service](http://nclees.org/memorial-march-and-service).

C.O.P.S. Blue Honor Gala

Washington Hilton Hotel; 6 p.m. Ticketed event.
Sold out. To be added to the waitlist, email
cops_development@nationalcops.org.

MAY 14 & 16
C.O.P.S. National Police
Survivors' Conference

Washington Hilton Hotel; 9 a.m. Registration
required. [concernsofpolicesurvivors.org/
aboutnpw](http://concernsofpolicesurvivors.org/aboutnpw).

C.O.P.S. Kids/Teens Program

Local law enforcement facilities;
8 a.m. Registration required.
concernsofpolicesurvivors.org/aboutnpw.

MAY 15
45th Annual National Peace
Officers' Memorial Service

West Front of the U.S. Capitol; 12 p.m.
For more information, contact Chair Matthew
Hagen at fopmemorial@gmail.com.



Wreath-Laying Ceremony

National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial; to be
held immediately following the memorial service.

Stand Watch for the Fallen

National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial;
12 p.m. tinyurl.com/NPW-stand-watch-2026.

MAY 15 & 16
Washington Nationals vs. Baltimore Orioles
Law Enforcement Appreciation Games

Nationals Park. [NLEOMF.org/event/washington-
nationals-national-police-week-offer-2026](http://NLEOMF.org/event/washington-nationals-national-police-week-offer-2026).

MAY 16
C.O.P.S. Blue Family Barbecue

Washington Hilton Hotel; 6 p.m.
concernsofpolicesurvivors.org/aboutnpw.

Schedule is subject to change. For more information,
go to policeweek.org and NLEOMF.org.

Fraternal Order of Police National Memorial Committee

Matthew Hagen
CHAIR



MAKING INFORMED

College Choices

**BRITTANI GASSNER / EBS UNION COLLEGE
BENEFIT VICE PRESIDENT – EDUCATION BENEFITS**



For many law enforcement officers and their families, going back to school is about more than just earning a degree. It's about improving career opportunities, increasing earning potential and building long-term stability. But with so many colleges advertising flexible programs, fast degrees and discounted tuition, it can be difficult to tell what's legitimate and what could turn out to be a costly mistake. One of the most important things to understand before enrolling anywhere is accreditation and how it impacts both job eligibility and credit transfer.

Why Accreditation Matters

Accreditation is a quality assurance process through which colleges and universities are evaluated by recognized accrediting bodies. These agencies assess institutions based on academic standards, faculty qualifications, student support services and overall institutional effectiveness. However, not all accreditation carries the same weight. The two most discussed are:

- **Regional accreditation:** Often considered the gold standard, this applies to nonprofit and public

colleges and universities. These institutions are widely recognized for meeting rigorous academic and operational standards.

- National accreditation: Typically associated with career, technical or for-profit institutions. While some nationally accredited schools offer legitimate programs, their credits are often less transferable and may not be accepted by regionally accredited institutions.

There are also programmatic accreditations that apply to specific fields such as nursing, business or education. These can be important for licensure and career advancement but do not replace institutional accreditation.

Avoiding Misleading or Invalid Accreditation

One of the most common pitfalls prospective students face is enrolling in institutions that claim accreditation from agencies that are not recognized by the U.S. Department of Education or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). These unrecognized accrediting bodies often sound legitimate, but they do not meet established standards. Degrees from such institutions may not be accepted by employers, licensing boards or other colleges. Before enrolling, prospective students should verify the accrediting agency through official government or CHEA databases, confirm that the institution is listed as accredited by a recognized body and be cautious of vague or unclear accreditation claims on school websites.

Transfer of Credit

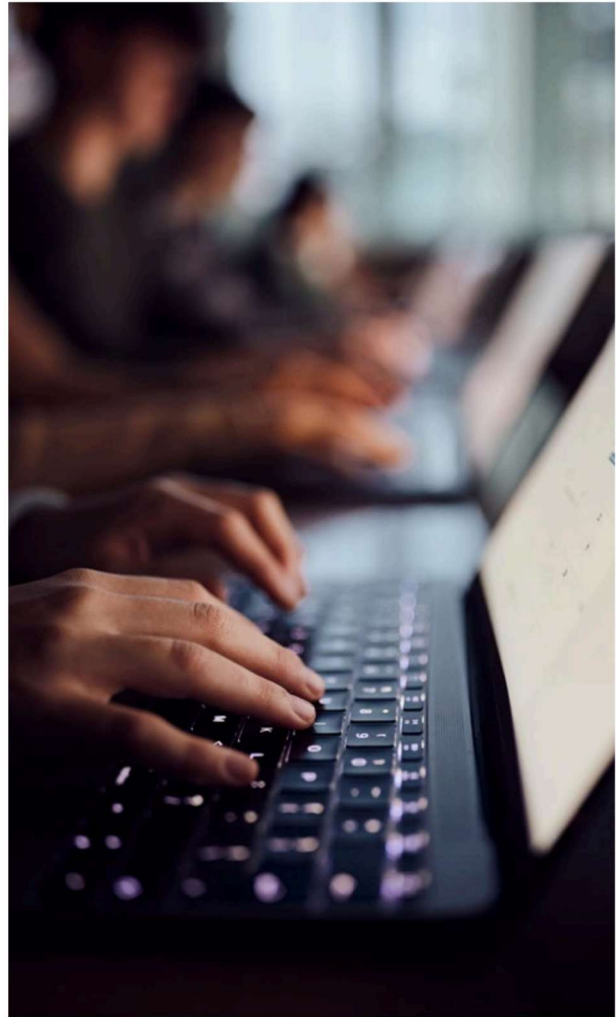
Another critical aspect of higher education is the transferability of credits. A common assumption is that once a course is completed, the credit will transfer seamlessly to another institution. Transfer credit is always determined by the receiving institution. This means that even if a school is accredited, another college may choose not to accept its credits. Differences in accreditation type (regional versus national) can affect transfer decisions, and course content, grades and program alignment also play a role.

Because of this, students should never assume transferability. Instead, they should contact the intended transfer institution before enrolling elsewhere, request written confirmation of which credits will be accepted and review articulation agreements when available. Doing this upfront due diligence can prevent the loss of time, money and academic progress.

Recognizing Red Flags

In addition to accreditation concerns, there are several warning signs that prospective students should take seriously:

- Promises of extremely fast or guaranteed degrees
- Extensive use of American Council on Education or National College Credit Recommendation Service credits, which are not the same as traditional college coursework and not always accepted
- High-pressure enrollment tactics



- Lack of transparency around tuition, fees or outcomes
- Limited or no information about faculty, curriculum or student support

Making an Informed Decision

Choosing a college is not just about finding the quickest or cheapest option; it is about ensuring that the education received will hold long-term value. Accreditation, credit transfer policies and institutional credibility all play a role in that outcome. **FOP**



FINDING BALANCE

in Law Enforcement



RACHAEL STARK / RESERVE POLICE OFFICER, RESEARCH ASSOCIATE

Wellness is an important part of law enforcement, but it doesn't always look the way people expect it to. In a profession where schedules are unpredictable and demands are constant, maintaining wellness is less about perfect routines and more about what is actually realistic day to day.

I've come to realize that even though wellness is talked about more, mental health is still not openly discussed in this field. People still lower their voice when they say words like "therapy" or "medication," like it's something to be hidden. Because of that, a lot of people try to handle things on their own instead of using the resources that are available. Sometimes people don't even know what resources **are** available.

Early in my career, after a couple years on the road as a patrol officer, I worked as a forensic death investigator at a local medical examiner's office. This was a role that closely intersected and worked alongside law enforcement, so it



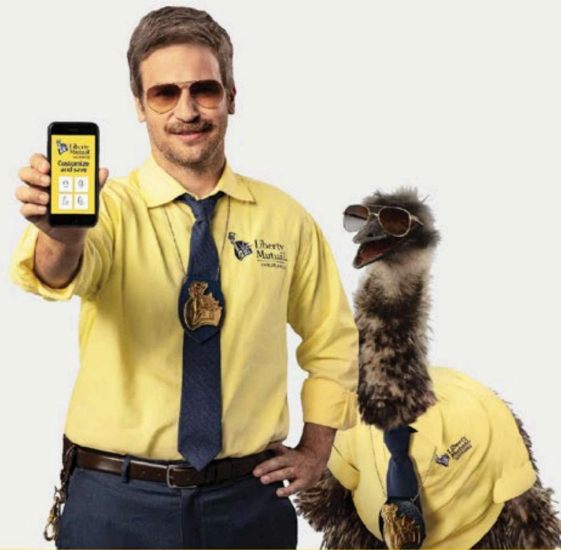
Reaghan Lesh

felt like a natural next step to dive into deeper investigative work. It also felt like a deeper way to directly help families during some of the hardest moments of their lives. We jokingly referred to ourselves as "last responders," but the reality of that work was heavy. I was regularly walking into scenes that most people never have to

experience, and many of those calls stayed with me long after the shift ended. No one was doing anything wrong; I just didn't really know how to separate what I was seeing from how it was affecting me. More than that, I didn't know what to do with it in my head. I found myself carrying the weight of work home to my husband — who is also in law enforcement — more than I realized. I could feel the stress starting to spill over into parts of my life outside of work. I felt like I was making an impact and the work I was doing mattered, but at the same time, it felt like life was speeding by around me. I had let being a police officer and investigator become such a big part of my identity that, at some point, I had let the job take up more space in my life than I realized.

What stood out to me was that I didn't really have anything to do outside of work. We would come home, eat whatever meal made sense for the time of day and that was it. The day was over. Work became the topic of conversation,

Continued on page 26 >



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This organization receives financial support for offering this auto benefits program.

WELLNESS

Continued from page 24 >

and it felt like everything revolved around it. And the kinds of scenes from my work didn't make the best dinner conversation.

While I look back and recognize it as one of the most meaningful roles I've had, especially in terms of directly helping families, I also knew something needed to change. That experience made it clear that I needed to be more intentional about how I was taking care of myself.

Shortly after, I was hired by a police agency to write policy and work on national accreditation. The idea of identity really hit home when I moved into more of a behind-the-scenes role. For a while, I struggled with feeling like I was needed because so much of my identity had been tied to being the person who showed up, responded and handled things. Stepping away from that made me realize how much of myself I had wrapped up in the job. I realized that I could still help people from a broader, big-picture perspective, even if it looked different than what I was used to. I

was still important, I was still making a difference and I was still needed. That shift in perspective also gave me something I hadn't had in a long time: space. For the first time in a while, I found myself with both the free time and the mental space to look for a hobby.

At first, I didn't really know what to do with that time. I had spent so long in a routine where everything revolved around work that having free time felt unfamiliar. I had been in a constant survival mode, and the shift to slowing down felt abrupt.

I tried quieter activities at first, like reading and even adult LEGO sets, but I quickly realized I needed something that got me out of the house. Once I was off work for the day, I found myself wanting more structure to my afternoons. Since I finally had the ability to commit to things that happened on a regular schedule, I started looking around my community for options.

I thought about things I had always wanted to do growing up, and learning to play an instrument stood out. Within a few days, I found a teacher and rented

a violin. Over two years later, I'm still learning. I also convinced my husband to find a way that we could do something together, and we ended up picking up pickleball and joining a league. I found smaller ways to slow down, too, like reading, even finishing 150 books in one year. In my current role, I've been fortunate to be part of a department with a strong peer support program, and I've seen firsthand how much of a difference it can make when those resources are actually used. I'm grateful to be able to use my own experience to help others who may be going through similar challenges.

For some people, that might mean therapy. For others, it might mean finally making time for a hobby, a workout class or dinner with family without talking about work ... or just not the whole time.

What I realized is that sometimes wellness isn't complicated. Sometimes wellness is picking up a good book or a stolen quiet moment getting lost in Target. Wellness in this profession is about finding what works for you and showing up for it consistently, even when the job makes that difficult. **FOP**

WELLNESS PROVIDERS

Chateau Recovery Midway, UT

chateaurecovery.com/first-responders

FHE Health:

Shatterproof Program Deerfield Beach, FL

fherehab.com/services/first-responders

First Responder Wellness by Simple Recovery

Costa Mesa, CA

firstresponder-wellness.com

Harbor of Grace First Responder Program Havre de Grace, MD

harborofgracerecovery.com/first-responders

Throttle and Thrive Palos Verdes Estates, CA

throttleandthrive.com

Warrior's Heart Bandera, TX

warriorsheart.com

Find more vetted and approved wellness providers
and programs at fop.net/officer-wellness/providers.



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University of Management and Technology

Bridging the Gap: Academic Excellence and Professional Flexibility at UMT

For the modern law enforcement officer, the pursuit of higher education often feels like a secondary priority, sidelined by the demands of rotating shifts, overtime and the inherent unpredictability of the job. However, in an increasingly complex policing landscape, the value of specialized knowledge in management, technology and public administration has never been higher.

Located in the heart of Arlington, Virginia, the **University of Management and Technology (UMT)** has spent over 25 years refining a model of education that accommodates military and first responders.

The primary barrier for FOP members returning to school is time. UMT addresses this through a **100% online, self-paced learning model**. Unlike traditional programs that require logging in at specific times, UMT allows officers to complete coursework around their duty schedules. Whether you are on the night shift in a local lodge or managing a task force at the federal level, the classroom is available when you are.

Strategic Curriculum for Promotion

UMT's curriculum is strategically aligned with the skills needed for promotion and specialized agency roles. Key programs include:

- **Criminal Justice and Homeland Security:** Focusing on the evolving threats and administrative hurdles of modern public safety.
- **Project Management:** A global leader in this field, UMT provides the logistics and command-level skills vital for administrative roles.
- **Information Technology:** As cybercrime and digital forensics become central to investigations, UMT's IT programs provide the technical foundation necessary for the 21st-century detective.



FOP member benefits include:

- **Reduced tuition:** Normal cost of \$390 per credit is reduced to \$250 per credit.
- **Zero textbook costs:** UMT provides your textbooks free of charge.
- **Waived fees:** No fees to get started; most fees (registration, program changes, etc.) are waived.
- **Maximize your experience:** Transfer up to 75% of undergraduate or 50% of graduate credits. We value your previous college credit and professional training.
- **Family coverage:** Benefits are extended to eligible family members.
- **Dedicated support:** Every student is assigned a student advisor for one-on-one guidance.

"UMT made going back to school an easy decision," says Christopher Reed. After researching UMT's educational programs, he quickly realized the school was a perfect fit for his demanding career. "The online format allowed me to balance school with my professional responsibilities, and the application process was seamless. The way

everything was organized online made time management easy. The admissions counselor I worked with was great, making everything smooth and stress-free. Choosing UMT was a no-brainer."

Beyond the logistics, Reed found immense value in the course content and the community. He appreciated the structure and flexibility of the courses and enjoyed building connections with peers through the discussion boards.

A particularly memorable moment from his studies was a public speaking assignment that offered fresh insights into his day-to-day work.

"Learning public speaking techniques really changed the way I approach my job. It was one of my favorite assignments," he recalls.

Now, with the completion of his bachelor's degree, Reed has begun a Master's in Public Administration (MPA). Even as a law enforcement chief, he recognizes the value of continuous education to enhance his leadership capabilities.

"This degree will have a huge impact on my career," he noted. "It makes me better

skilled and prepared for any law enforcement leadership roles that come down in the future. Earning my degree will open doors to leadership opportunities and help me achieve my goal of becoming a chief of police.”

“The flexibility, support and structured courses allowed me to balance my education with my career. Earning my degree will open doors to leadership opportunities and help me achieve my goal of becoming a chief of police.”
— Christopher Reed (MPA)

Join Us Today!

Our quality and affordable programs are 100% online. Study anywhere, anytime — just not when you are catching the bad guys, please.

About UMT

The University of Management and Technology is an accredited university located in Arlington, Virginia. Chartered by the State Council of Higher Education of Virginia (SCHEV) and accredited by the Distance Education Accrediting Commission (DEAC), UMT’s degree programs in project management are also accredited by the Global Accreditation Center (GAC) of the Project Management Institute (PMI).

For additional information, visit umtweb.edu. **FOP**

The National Fraternal Order of Police University

The National Fraternal Order of Police University (NFOPU) has successfully paved the way for hundreds of FOP members to pursue higher or continued education. For more information on the NFOPU Consortium, go to FOP.net/fop-university.



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Ashland, OH



Orange Beach, AL



Romeoville, IL



San Diego, CA



Cape Girardeau, MO



Manchester, NH



Tiffin, OH



Cincinnati, OH



Arlington, VA



Adelphi, MD



San Diego, CA



Williamsburg, KY



Fayette, IA



Minneapolis, MN



Wichita, KS

FOP.net/fop-university



FirstNet, FISA, DHS Funding, Cabinet Shakeups and More



Legislative Update: FirstNet Reauthorization

Following action by the House Energy and Commerce Committee to favorably report H.R. 7386, the First Responder Network Authority Reauthorization Act, the House considered and passed the bill by voice under a suspension of rules.

The reauthorization of First Responder Network Authority (FirstNet) is a top legislative priority for the FOP, and officer safety must be the foremost priority for this legislation. Our members' lives literally depend on FirstNet, so we need to be absolutely certain that the men and women who rely on FirstNet every day have a network that is reliable, effective and free from unnecessary obstacles that could place them in jeopardy, which is why we advocated so strongly for a "clean reauthorization." Unfortunately, the House bill includes very problematic governance provisions that could negatively impact officer safety and the ability of FirstNet to do its job in the most effective manner.

The law that established FirstNet makes clear that public safety personnel should be in charge of their network and empowered to make decisions about the operation and ongoing improvement of the network. There are real consequences to America's law enforcement officers and other first responders if FirstNet is subject to administrative or bureaucratic delays that prevent it from making timely investments in network improvements or technological innovations. The governance provisions in the bill compromise the entity's independence and place it under the oversight of the National Telecommunications and Information Administration

Just the Facts:

» The FOP is working to ensure that Congress passes a "clean" FirstNet reauthorization without governance provisions that would impact the network's ability to do its job. A long-term extension for FISA hit a snag in the House, but the Senate took the first step in the budget reconciliation process to fund DHS, including ICE and CBP. The FOP is committed to fighting to preserve the new tax benefits regarding overtime pay, as well as supporting other legislation that puts more money in members' pockets. In executive branch news, Attorney General Bondi, ICE Acting Director Lyons and Secretary of Labor Chavez-DeRemer have all stepped down, while FBI Director Patel voiced strong support for harsher penalties for those who commit violence against law enforcement.

(NTIA) within the U.S. Department of Commerce. The FOP strongly believes that this will impose redundant governmental oversight, heighten procedural burdens and escalate expenses without tangible advantages for public safety. It is our officers whose lives depend on these communication systems, and we must ensure that their views are communicated clearly and directly without needing to fight through additional layers of bureaucracy.

Supporters of the legislation maintain that these governance provisions are necessary for transparency and oversight, yet there has been no explanation as to how this would benefit the operational ability of FirstNet to do its job and no explanation as to how these provisions would improve officer safety.

The FOP will engage with our allies in the Senate and work to ensure that Congress passes a "clean" reauthorization bill without any provisions that would interfere with the ability of FirstNet to keep our men and women in the field safe during emergency operations.

Legislative Update: FISA Reauthorization Hits Snag as Congress Fails to Pass Long-Term Extension

Despite backing from the president, the House failed to pass a long-term extension for Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act (FISA). The bill, which was designated as H.R. 8035 and would have extended FISA authorities until 2027, was rejected on a vote of 197–228. This occurred due to a breakdown in negotiations between House leadership and Republican holdouts, who pushed for changes to be made to the original FISA bill.

Due to this, the House instead passed a short-term extension of the original bill. Designated as H.R. 8322, the bill extends the authorities through April 30, giving the House additional time to negotiate a long-term extension. This bill was swiftly passed by the Senate as well, sending the bill to be signed into law by President Trump and avoiding a lapse in FISA authorities.

Section 702 of FISA allows the Central Intelligence Agency, National Security Agency, Federal Bureau of Investigation and other intelligence

agencies to collect various amounts of overseas communication without a judicial warrant.

Legislative Update: Senate Paves the Way for New Budget Reconciliation Bill, Starting With a Late-Night Vote-a-Rama

The Senate began a late-night “vote-a-rama” on Wednesday, April 23, and considered 17 amendments, out of 320 amendments filed, before adopting S. Con. Res. 33, a budgetary resolution that begins the process to fund the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS), including the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP), on a 50–48 vote.

The DHS has been operating without funding since February 14, but many of its components, like ICE and CBP, are using funding provided by last year’s One Big Beautiful Bill Act (OBBBA). It is possible that, with the adoption of the Senate budget resolution, that the House will consider H.R. 7147, the Fiscal 2026 Homeland Security Appropriations, which the Senate passed by unanimous

consent in March. This legislation provides funding for DHS, with the exception of ICE and CBP.

The passage of S. Con. Res. 33 is the first step in the budget reconciliation process, which will allow Republicans to fund DHS, ICE, CBP and other border-related programs at approximately \$70 billion. After the House passes its own budget resolution, the two resolutions will be reconciled, and then work can begin on funding DHS and its components.

Executive Branch Update: Bondi Steps Down as Attorney General and Other Executive Office Departures

Early last month, President Trump announced that Pamela Bondi would step down from her position as U.S. attorney general. The current deputy assistant U.S. attorney general, Todd Blanche, has been named acting attorney general until the president nominates someone for the role.

Todd Lyons, acting director of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) within the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, has announced that he will resign his post at the end of this month.

U.S. Secretary of Labor Lori Chavez-DeRemer also left the president’s cabinet this month. Deputy Labor Secretary Keith Sonderling has been named acting secretary and will serve until President Trump names a replacement.

FBI Director Patel Speaks Out About Violence Against Law Enforcement

During an appearance on SiriusXM Patriots’ *Breitbart News Sunday*, Federal Bureau of Investigation Director Kash Patel issued a strong warning to individuals who attack law enforcement officers. In the interview, he stressed that the FBI would work strongly with local, state and federal law enforcement partners to ensure those responsible for assaults on officers are held accountable, saying, “You have to back the blue. If you touch a cop, we’re going to put you down. We’re going to find you and we’re going to arrest you.”

Patel’s statements come in the wake of continued violence against officers in 2026. As of April 10, 87 officers had been shot in the line of

Continued on page 32 >

There Is ALWAYS Another Option

FOP Vetted and Approved Crisis Hotlines



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[FOP.net/officer-wellness/crisis-hotlines](https://www.fop.net/officer-wellness/crisis-hotlines)

Top Priorities in Brief



H.R. 3226, the Law Enforcement Officers Equity Act

House: 63 co-sponsors (18 R, 45 D)

Senate: Not yet introduced

H.R. 1505/S. 636, the Public Safety Employer–Employee Cooperation Act

House: 62 co-sponsors (10 R, 52 D)

Senate: 1 co-sponsor (1 D)

H.R. 2243/S. 679, the LEOSA Reform Act

House: Passed

Senate: 11 co-sponsors (11 R)

H.R. 1551/S. 167, the Protect and Serve Act

House: 109 co-sponsors (88 R, 21 D)

Senate: 25 co-sponsors (25 R)

H.R. 2094/S. 978, the Homes for Every Local Protector, Educator, and Responder (HELPER) Act

House: 123 co-sponsors (46 R, 77 D)

Senate: 23 co-sponsors (8 R, 15 D)

To see a full list of legislation supported by the FOP in the previous Congress, please visit tinyurl.com/ycy5k5rv. Members should continue to monitor the FOP's social media platforms and our website for the latest legislative news.



WASHINGTON REPORT

Continued from page 31 >

duty and nine had been killed. Of these shootings, 17 were ambush-style attacks, resulting in 21 officers shot, four of whom were killed. Because of the ongoing threat officers face from individuals determined to do them harm, the National FOP helped develop the Protect and Serve Act, which would impose federal penalties on individuals, in very specific circumstances, who deliberately target law enforcement officers with violence.

However, despite backing from Patel and the Trump administration, the bill has been stalled in committee since its introduction last year. We at the FOP believe it is far past time for Congress to do its job and pass this critical piece of legislation, and we will do everything we can to get this bill in front of President Trump for his signature.

New Federal Tax Policies and What They Mean for You

The new federal tax laws benefit many of our members, who may see smaller tax bills and more money in their pockets. New laws reduce income tax on tips, overtime pay and Social Security benefits — delivering meaningful relief to our members. Officers are often required to work long overtime hours as part of their job, and they are now finally able to deduct a portion of overtime pay from their taxes, putting more money in their pockets and rewarding them for their hard work.

This is thanks to the Working Families Tax Cut, passed as part of the One Big Beautiful Bill Act, which offers an above-the-line deduction available for tax years 2025–2028 for overtime. As of 2026, officers making under \$150,000 can deduct up to \$12,500 from their overtime if filing as a single filer. This was a key promise from President Trump during his campaign, and the FOP is proud to have endorsed this policy during his presidential run.

On April 16, one day after Tax Day, President Yoes noted: “These changes to the tax code recognize the sacrifices our officers make every single day.

No more taxing the extra hours they work. No more taxing the benefits they

earned after a lifetime of service. This is real, tangible support for the brave men and women who run toward danger while others run away.”

The FOP will continue to do everything we can to not only preserve these tax benefits, but also support other legislation that puts more money in our members’ pockets. For example, just last month, the FOP endorsed H.R. 5475/S. 4310, the No Tax on Overtime for All Workers Act, which expands these tax cuts to include officers who have different overtime requirements as part of a collective bargaining agreement. The bill is sponsored by Representative Malliotakis in the House and Senator Justice in the Senate, and the FOP will continue to work for its passage to ensure fair treatment under the tax code for all our members.

Other Legislative Activity

The FOP has supported the following legislation since the last issue of the *Journal*:

- **S. 3626**, the Federal Correctional Officer Paycheck Protection Act, which would establish a 35% increase to the General Schedule base pay for all BOP correctional staff, including GS, GL and custodial wage-grade employees
- **S. 4260**, the Child Predators Accountability Act, which would refine statutory definitions to ensure that the law encompasses both active and passive involvement of minors in sexually explicit depictions when the offender intentionally includes a child
- **S. 3675**, the ICE Protection Act, which would double the penalties for assaulting a federal law enforcement officer with a weapon as well as add mandatory minimum sentences for using a vehicle to assault an officer
- **H.R. 5475/S.4310**, the No Tax on Overtime for All Workers Act, which would expand a key provision of the Working Families Tax Cut Act to allow officers who are part of a CBA to deduct the same amount of overtime from their taxes as officers who are not

Sign Up for the FOP's Weekly Update

The FOP's *Weekly Update* from Capitol Hill is distributed every week, providing our members with the latest news from Washington, D.C. If you're not getting it, go to tinyurl.com/FOP-weekly-update to sign up.

Also, make sure you are a regular visitor to all our social media platforms, as these frequent posts are the best way to keep up with the National FOP's daily activity. Follow the National FOP on:

- Facebook (@GLFOP)
- X (@GLFOP)
- Instagram (@FOPnational)
- Truth Social (@FOPNational)

Do your part! Please **share**, **comment** and **like** our content.

NFOP PAC Update

The PAC recently just passed a milestone: we now have more than \$100,000 in the bank. While this is a good first step, it is a paltry sum

compared to the amounts of our counterparts, so much work remains to be done.

We need more of our members to contribute to ensure that our PAC has the resources to support candidates who will fight for our officers and the issues that are important to them. With the next election cycle just months away, we have time to replenish our PAC funds — but we need to start today.

We are asking all FOP members to find a way to contribute to the National FOP PAC. Our profession depends on having well-informed lawmakers who listen to and understand the challenges facing law enforcement today.

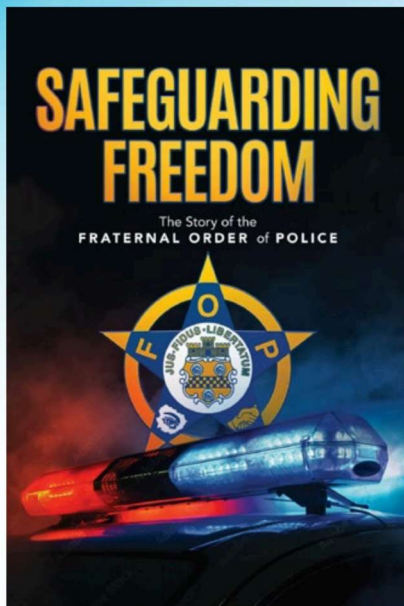
We are urging members (and lodges) to sign up for recurring, monthly contributions using their credit card. This is the most effective and reliable way to contribute and to strengthen our PAC.

These contributions need not be for large amounts (though these are also very much appreciated) — but every dollar helps! If every FOP member gave just \$1, we could raise \$382,000! If 10% of our members gave just \$5 this year, we would raise more than \$191,100.

To donate online, please go to nfop-pac.firstresponderprocessing.com.

If you would like to donate via check, please make it out to the National Fraternal Order of Police Political Action Committee and mail it to 328 Massachusetts Ave. NE, Washington, D.C. 20002. For inquiries about our effortless payroll deduction program or to sign up for recurring monthly donations, please contact the Steve Young Law Enforcement Legislative Advocacy Center at (202) 547-8189 or David Taboh at dtaboh@fop.net.

Thank you to all of you who have supported and continue to support our PAC with regular contributions. **FOP**



SAFEGUARDING FREEDOM: The Story of the Fraternal Order of Police

The National Fraternal Order of Police History Committee and the National Board of Trustees are excited to present you with a new book, *Safeguarding Freedom: The Story of the Fraternal Order of Police*. This literary work is the result of reviewing historical documents, combing through thousands of photographs and conducting interviews to give the reader a comprehensive history of how the Fraternal Order of Police has impacted policing in America. Author Max DiLallo, co-author with James Patterson on numerous books, along with the direction of National History Committee Chair David Stevens, has worked tirelessly over the past year to reveal the journey of the FOP.

This fantastic book is available from the National Office for \$25 plus shipping, and the proceeds benefit our National FOP Foundation. Donations of \$30 or more to the Foundation will receive a free book.



Where Labor Services Fits Within the National FOP

A Central Pillar Supporting Lodges Across the Country

NFOP Labor Services is one of the major operational divisions within the national organization, and its role can be understood through its strategic, structural and practical contributions.

Strategically, Labor Services functions as the FOP's labor relations backbone. It ensures that local lodges have access to expert support during negotiations, guidance on complex labor issues and representation in disputes and arbitration. This work strengthens the FOP's national

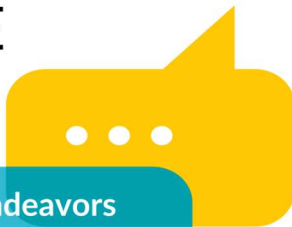
influence and helps maintain consistent labor standards across jurisdictions.

Structurally, Labor Services operates under the national FOP leadership and works alongside other key divisions, including the Legislative Office, the Legal Defense Plan, Education and Training, and Membership Services. Among these divisions, Labor Services is the one most directly involved in collective bargaining and employment rights, making it essential to the organization's mission of protecting officers and improving working conditions.

Practically, Labor Services provides critical support to local lodges, especially those that lack the resources to build their own labor relations infrastructure. It helps lodges become recognized bargaining agents, negotiate contracts, prepare for arbitration, analyze local labor conditions and develop long-term bargaining strategies. This ensures that every lodge, regardless of size, has access to professional grade labor expertise.

Labor Services emerged naturally as NFOP expanded into the nation's largest police labor organization. Today, it serves as a cornerstone of the NFOP, delivering the expertise, research and negotiation strength that local lodges depend on to secure strong contracts and safeguard officers' rights, all while staying true to the organization's fraternal roots. **FOP**

LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD!



The FOP constantly endeavors to hear about the experiences of our members, so that we can understand how best to serve you.

The FOP was selected to partner with the Department of Justice to build standardized training in law enforcement peer support. Share your thoughts with us on how this training can best help our profession at [surveymonkey.com/r/PowerInPeers](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PowerInPeers).



Scan the QR code for more information about NFOP Labor Services.

NATIONAL FOP AUXILIARY PEACE OFFICERS' MEMORIAL SERVICE

COMMEMORATIVE
CHALLENGE COIN

ORDER FORM

FRONT



3D antique silver



3D antique brass

BACK



The National FOP Auxiliary is selling the above pictured Memorial Challenge Coins. The proceeds from this coin will go back to the FOP Foundation to support the May 15 National Peace Officers' Memorial Service. Your support is appreciated.

To order, please email the completed form to **fopauxiliary@fop.net**. You will receive an invoice via email from the National FOP Auxiliary Square account that includes a total for coins and shipping.

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Form updated 3/23/2026



Heeter v. Bowers Verdict Upheld: What the Final Outcome Means for Officers



In a previous article, we covered *Heeter v. Bowers* as a warning about the constitutional obligations officers face after a use-of-force incident — particularly the obligation to render medical aid. At that point, the case was headed to trial after both the federal district court and the Sixth Circuit denied Officer Kenneth Bowers qualified immunity on the excessive force and deliberate indifference claims.

On July 7, 2025, after years of litigation, a federal jury in the Southern District of Ohio returned a verdict in favor of Bowers on all counts, finding that he neither used excessive force nor violated Heeter's constitutional right to adequate medical care. The Heeter family subsequently moved for judgment as a matter of law and, in the alternative, a new trial. On March 31, Judge Algenon L. Marbley denied both motions. The verdict stands. This ruling provides important guidance for officers and their lawyers moving forward.

On the excessive force claim, plaintiffs argued that Bowers lacked any rational basis for firing his rifle — that his belief Heeter was drawing a weapon was not grounded in articulable facts. The court disagreed. Bowers responded to a call involving a suicidal and armed individual who had warned that he “couldn't be held responsible” for what might happen if police showed up. Inside the home, the gun was never confirmed to be on the table. Heeter refused repeated commands, and his hands were not visible at the moment Bowers fired. Under those circumstances, the court found that reasonable minds could differ as to the appropriateness of the use of force, making it properly a question for the

Just the Facts:

» The federal jury verdict in *Heeter v. Bowers* found that the officer neither used excessive force nor violated the plaintiff's constitutional right to adequate medical care. This ruling provides important guidance for officers and their lawyers. The legal standards established on appeal remain intact: Officers who have the training, the time and the opportunity to render aid after a shooting have a constitutional obligation to do so. However, the verdict confirms that juries are capable of making careful, fact-specific determinations when presented with the full operational context, including expert testimony regarding use-of-force standards and police practices, and documentation of the chain-of-command decisions made in the immediate aftermath of a shooting.

jury. The jury's answer, therefore, was entitled to deference.

On the deliberate indifference claim, the court again deferred to the jury's findings. The record established that Bowers was the designated point officer responsible for scene security. Heeter was face down and handcuffed, but his hands remained out of sight and the house had not yet been fully secured. Other officers had already called EMS, and Sergeant Redding — the officer in command — directed Bowers to step outside and secure his rifle. Whether Bowers acted recklessly under those specific, fast-moving conditions was a question for the jury. The jury answered it for the defense, and the court left that answer alone.

Plaintiffs raised three grounds relevant here for a new trial and none succeeded. First, plaintiffs reframed their Rule 50 sufficiency challenge as a basis for a new trial. The court disposed of this argument quickly, noting that evidence sufficient to survive judgment as a matter of law cannot independently support a new trial on the same grounds.

Second, plaintiffs attacked the credibility of Bowers and his expert witness, Patrick Vehr, a defense tactics instructor at the Columbus Division of Police. They characterized Bowers' account as an “outright fabrication” and argued that Vehr was too willing to accept Bowers' version of events. The court was not persuaded. It emphasized that credibility determinations are the exclusive province of the jury and are not subject to reevaluation simply because the losing party disagrees with the outcome. Plaintiffs failed to identify any authority requiring the jury to discredit Bowers' testimony, and mere disagreement with how the jury weighed competing evidence does not warrant a new trial.

Finally, plaintiffs argued that the probable cause instruction was deficient because it did not expressly state that “hunches” or “subjective good faith” alone are insufficient to establish probable cause. The court rejected this. The instruction, drawn

NATIONAL FOP AUXILIARY ROLL CALL OF HEROES

COMMEMORATIVE CHALLENGE COIN

ORDER FORM



FRONT

Size: 78.7(w) x 83.3(h)mm
Thickness: 4mm



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The National FOP Auxiliary is selling the above pictured Memorial Challenge Coins. This coin will contain the 2026 Roll Call of Heroes names as a reminder It's All About the White Chairs. Your support is greatly appreciated.

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LEGAL COUNSEL

Continued from page 36 >

from the Ninth Circuit's pattern jury instruction, directed jurors to consider all relevant facts and circumstances from the perspective of a reasonable officer on the scene — an accurate and complete statement of the law. As the Supreme Court has long recognized, probable cause is a fluid, totality-of-the-circumstances standard that does not reduce to a rigid checklist and does not involve the 20/20 vision of hindsight. Plaintiffs' proposed addition would have muddied the waters without adding legal accuracy. The court found no error.

The outcome in *Heeter v. Bowers* does not walk back the legal standards the Sixth Circuit established on appeal. Those principles remain intact: Officers who have the training, the time and the opportunity to render aid after a shooting have a constitutional obligation to do so. Calling EMS is not a substitute for acting when you can. Officers need to know that and operate accordingly.

This verdict confirms that context is everything, and juries are capable of making careful, fact-specific determinations when presented with the full scope of the circumstances. The scene of this case was fast-moving and dangerous. The chain of command was active and giving orders. Other officers were on scene addressing Heeter's condition. Bowers was operating as the point officer with ongoing security responsibilities, and he acted on a direct order from his sergeant to leave the scene. The jury weighed all of these factors and ultimately found in favor of law enforcement.

For law enforcement lawyers, this case reinforces several practical points. Effective expert testimony regarding use-of-force standards and police practices remains essential. Documenting the chain-of-command decisions made in the immediate aftermath of a shooting is critical. And presenting the jury with the full operational context, not just the moments captured on bodycam, can be the difference between a defense verdict and a multimillion-dollar judgment.

For officers, the core lesson from our first article remains unchanged: your legal exposure does not end when the threat is neutralized. But this case is a real-world example of what it looks like when an officer's actions are viewed in full context by a jury of ordinary citizens — and the system works the way it is supposed to. **FOP**

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Honoring the Fallen Through Professional Development



Each May, our profession pauses. In Washington, D.C., at the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial and in communities across this country, law enforcement officers, families and citizens gather for the many memorial services that take place during National

Honoring the fallen is not only about looking back, but also about what we do moving forward.

Police Week. Whether standing in a formal ceremony or at a local vigil, we are reminded of the weight of the badge — and the responsibility we carry every day.

We remember.

We reflect.

But we also have an obligation to act.

Because honoring the fallen is not only about looking back, but also about what we do moving forward.

Professional development in law enforcement is often viewed as a requirement. In reality, it is one of the most important commitments we make to each other. Every leadership lesson, wellness initiative, legal update and shared experience strengthens our ability to serve and, more importantly, to protect one another. That includes maintaining a high level of tactical awareness, staying alert, reading situations as they unfold

and recognizing threats before they escalate. It also means continually sharpening our tactics and self-defense skills so that when action is required, it is decisive, controlled and effective.

These are perishable skills. They require repetition, discipline and constant refinement. When we invest in them, we give our officers the tools not just to respond, but to survive.

This is how we reduce risk.

This is how we improve decision-making.

This is how we bring more officers home safely.

Modern policing demands more than tactics alone. It requires strong leadership, attention to wellness, sound judgment and the ability to navigate complex challenges with professionalism and integrity. These are not competing priorities; they are complementary. Tactical readiness and officer wellness go hand in hand. A prepared officer is a safer officer, physically, mentally and emotionally.

Every name etched into the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial represents more than loss — it represents responsibility.

A responsibility to learn.

A responsibility to improve.

A responsibility to lead.

If we are serious about honoring them, then we must be equally serious about preparing those who continue to wear the badge. Professional development is not the responsibility of a single program or individual. It belongs to all of us, and it demands our continued attention.

As we reflect this May, we must also look ahead with purpose.

We often say, “We will never forget.”

We uphold that promise not only in remembrance, but in how we prepare, how we grow and how we carry this profession forward.

That is how we honor them.

Until we meet again, God bless you and God bless the FOP! **FOP**

FOP DIVISION OF EDUCATION AND OUTREACH

If you have further questions, contact Director Keith Turney at kturney@fop.org, or (815) 482-5620.

And don't forget about the Collaborative Reform Initiative – Technical Assistance Center (CRI-TAC) for no-cost training and consultation delivered by the field, for the field, from subject-matter experts from across the country. For more information, visit cops.usdoj.gov/cri-tac.





The FOP Store

Gear That Represents

Front Image

Back Image



The challenge coin commemorates the 250th anniversary of signing the Declaration of Independence.

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