

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 5, 2006

The Honorable Richard C. Shelby, Chairman
The Honorable Barbara A. Mikulski, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice and Science
Committee on Appropriations
United States Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Chairman Shelby and Senator Mikulski:

As you begin your work on the Subcommittee's appropriations for Fiscal Year (FY) 2007, we respectfully request your support for full funding at \$50,000,000 for the Bulletproof Vest Partnership (BVP) Grant Program.

Only a short time ago, Congress passed and the President signed into law the reauthorization of the BVP Grant Program as part of the Violence Against Women and Department of Justice Reauthorization Act of 2005 (Public Law 109-162). That law authorizes \$50,000,000 per year through FY 2009 for this successful program that protects the lives of local and State law enforcement officers. Indeed, the BVP is so successful that since 1999 it has provided law enforcement officers in 11,900 jurisdictions nationwide with nearly 450,000 new bulletproof vests.

Despite the value of this Program to ensuring the distribution of lifesaving bulletproof vests to law enforcement officers serving in the front lines nationwide, the President's budget proposal for FY 2007 slashes its funding by \$19,797,000, or by 67 percent. The Senate, however, opposed this effort and approved a floor amendment to the Senate Budget Resolution for FY 2007 to fully fund the Program.

Law enforcement agencies clearly need our help to purchase vests. In recent years, the Bureau of Justice Assistance, which administers BVP grants, has received requests from small jurisdictions for more than double the funds appropriated. The authorizing legislation requires that jurisdictions with populations of up to 100,000 residents receive priority funding.

Compounding the usual funding demand for help to purchase vests, concerns from the law enforcement community over the effectiveness of body armor surfaced in recent years when a Pennsylvania police officer was shot and critically wounded through his relatively new Zylon-based body armor vest. In August 2005, the Justice Department announced that test results indicated that used Zylon-containing body armor vests fails to provide the intended level of ballistic resistance. Unfortunately, an estimated 200,000 Zylon-based vests have been purchased – many with BVP funds – and now need to be replaced.

Bulletproof vests remain one of the foremost defenses for our uniformed officers, but law enforcement agencies nationwide are struggling over how to find the funds necessary to replace defective vests that are less than five years old with ones that will actually stop bullets and save lives. Vests cost between

\$500 and \$1,000 each, depending on the style. Officers are being forced to dip into their own pockets to pay for new vests unless the Federal government offers more help. We therefore support funding of at least \$50,000,000 for the Bulletproof Vest Partnership Grant Program for Fiscal Year 2007.

Thank you for your leadership in this critical area and for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Allen Jett

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