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Florida Attorney General's Office News Release

AG Moody Implores Congressional Leaders to Support Thin Blue Line Act



TALLAHASSEE, Fla.—Attorney General Ashley Moody today held a news conference alongside Congressman Vern Buchanan in support of the Thin Blue Line Act. The legislation, sponsored by Congressman Buchanan and Sen. Pat Toomey, would make the intentional killing, or attempted killing, of a law enforcement officer, prosecutor, firefighter or other first responder acting in the line of duty an aggravating factor under the federal death penalty statute.

Attorney General Ashley Moody said, “Our brave law enforcement officers risk their lives daily to protect and serve their communities. The first seven months of this year alone resulted in unprecedented violent acts, resulting in dozens of line-of-duty deaths for officers across our nation. We cannot permit the anti-police sentiment and blatant disrespect for law enforcement to fester and grow. Violent attacks on officers not only affect those who wear a badge, it lessens the safety and security of our communities at large.

“I am asking congressional leaders to take immediate action to protect those who swore an oath to serve by supporting the Thin Blue Line Act. This legislation will provide local and state law enforcement officers the same protection and support currently provided to federal officers—acting as a deterrent to anyone who would look to harm an officer.”

Congressman Vern Buchanan said, “Police officers and first responders put their lives on the line every single day to help those in harm’s way. I appreciate Attorney General Moody’s strong

endorsement and advocacy for my bill, the *Thin Blue Line Act.* Together, we are sending a strong message to police and first responders that we have their backs, and those who target our frontline heroes should know that there will be severe consequences."

The Thin Blue Line Act would align federal law with the laws of states that authorize capital punishment. Imposing the federal death penalty is decided through identifying aggravating factors that are established in a case and outweigh any proven mitigating factors. Nearly every state that authorizes the death penalty provides that the unlawful killing of a law enforcement officer is a statutory aggravator.

Under current federal law, the unlawful killing of a local or state law enforcement officer does not serve as an aggravator for purposes of the federal death penalty—although the unlawful killing of a federal law enforcement officer does qualify as an aggravator. This discrepancy lessens the likelihood of being charged with the death penalty for the murder of a local or state law enforcement officer, versus a federal law enforcement officer.

The Thin Blue Line Act will better ensure the same safety to local and state law enforcement officers that is currently provided to federal law enforcement officers. This additional protection is necessary as violent acts against officers continues to grow nationwide. Alongside recent civil unrest and scrutiny of law enforcement, there is a rise in an anti-police sentiment that, according to experts, manifested itself into violent acts against officers. According to the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the trend is worsening, with 44 law enforcement officers feloniously killed in the first seven months of 2021, representing a more than 40% increase in felonious line-of-duty deaths.

Florida is no exception to this disturbing national trend. At the end of 2020, Attorney General Moody alerted the public to the harrowing statistics that the total number of law enforcement officers who were killed in the line of duty nationwide last year doubled to more than 300, compared to 2019. Sadly, the trend continued into 2021 at an alarming rate in Florida. During the first two months of the year alone, seven Florida law enforcement officers lost their lives in the line of duty. By the end of March, the number rose to 11 Florida officers killed, with more than half of the deaths being attributed to violent acts against officers.

To read the Attorney General's letter to congressional leaders, click here.