



The Washington Report

The Newsletter of the National Association of Police Organizations
Representing America's Finest

November 20, 2019

NAPO President Participates in National Consortium on Preventing Law Enforcement Suicide

NAPO's President, Mick McHale sits on the National Consortium on Preventing Law Enforcement Suicide, a program of the Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance's National Officer Safety Initiatives that was established in 2018. The International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) and the National Action Alliance for Suicide Prevention, as the lead grantees, are leading the Consortium. The purpose of the group is to provide a voice to the mental health needs of law enforcement, bringing together experts from law enforcement agencies and families, mental health and suicide prevention services, and academia to raise awareness of and prevent law enforcement suicide.

Over the next year, the Consortium will lead a national conversation around the issue of law enforcement suicide. The result will be a comprehensive report with recommendations on consistent definitions and terminology relating to officer suicide; policy and procedure updates; research and data collection improvements; suicide awareness and prevention tools; and resources for law enforcement officers, agencies, and family members. The Consortium will also work on creating an anonymous online platform for law enforcement to report officer suicides to help identify trends and work towards solutions.

Representing 241,000 rank-and-file officers across the country as NAPO's president, McHale is taking his role on the Consortium very seriously and is ensuring that the concerns and needs of line officers are being considered in the conversation on how to address and prevent law enforcement suicide. As we well know, management can establish programs to help address officer mental health issues, but if the officers do not trust or believe in the program, they will not use it. A program that officers do not utilize is useless in preventing suicides, which is why our voice and support for any of the recommendations that come out of this Consortium are so important.

NAPO Meets with Vice President's Policy Staff

NAPO Executive Director Bill Johnson met with Vice President Pence's senior policy staff on November 18 to discuss NAPO's priority issues, how the Administration can support us with moving them, and continue the open lines of communication with the Administration. The Vice President's staff reached out to Johnson to set up the meeting, indicating the seriousness in which the Trump Administration takes its support of its state and local law enforcement partners and opening another avenue for NAPO to push our top priorities.

In addition to NAPO's top [legislative priorities](#), Johnson discussed our Annual TOP COP Awards® as well as using National Police Week as an opportunity to move and promote important legislation and policy in support of the law enforcement community. NAPO appreciates the support the Administration has shown law enforcement, particularly rank-and-file officers, and the working relationship we continue to grow with the Administration.

NAPO'S 32nd Annual Pension & Benefits Seminar

Register by December 1 for our Early Bird Rate

We invite you to join NAPO for our 32nd Annual Police, Fire, EMS & Municipal Employee Pension & Benefits Seminar to be held at Caesars Palace Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada, **January 26 – 28, 2020**. Participate in discussions on the pressing topics that are affecting your pension fund and benefits.

Topics will include: economic and political updates, asset allocations, alternative investments, plan administration in the digital age, balanced portfolios, healthcare and retirement, just to name a few!

Take an active role in improving your fund by registering for this informative seminar. The Registration Brochure is attached and check out NAPO's website at <http://www.napo.org/events/upcoming-events/2020-pension/> for the most up-to-date agenda or to register [online](#).

If you have any questions or need additional information please do not hesitate to contact Elizabeth Loranger, NAPO's Director of Events, at eloranger@napo.org or (703) 549-0775. We look forward to seeing you in Las Vegas!

NAPO on the Hill: First Responder Medicare Buy-In

NAPO endorsed the Expanding Health Care Options for Early Retirees Act (H.R. 4527 / S. 2552), sponsored by Representative Tom Malinowski (D-NJ) and Senator Sherrod Brown (D-OH), which would allow retired public safety officers ages 50 to 64 to buy-in to Medicare. As part of our efforts to support the bill we are engaging in a cosponsor push in the House, focusing on members of the two committees that have jurisdiction over the bill: the Ways and Means and Energy and Commerce Committees.

Law enforcement officers often retire earlier than other occupations because of the physical demands and unique hazards of the job, and many are faced with mandatory retirement upon reaching a certain age. Across the country, retiring officers are losing their employer-provided health insurance and, as they are years away from being Medicare-eligible, are forced to spend their retirement money on health insurance premiums.

This legislation is important as it would give law enforcement retirees another option to purchase affordable health insurance coverage. It would ensure they continue to have access to reasonable, comprehensive health insurance in retirement until they reach age 65 regardless of whether their state pension plan provides insurance coverage. The legislation would only allow the retired officers to buy-in to Medicare early; family members and dependents would not be eligible for this coverage.

NAPO believes that the Expanding Health Care Options for Early Retirees Act would help preserve the retirement security and the health of those public servants who selflessly serve and protect our communities. Preserving the retirement security of all our members is a top priority for us. If there is any way this bill would negatively impact your ability to negotiate health care for your retirees, please reach out to Andy Edmiston at aedmiston@napo.org. Also reach out to Andy if you have any questions or would like more information on the legislation.

[Expanding Health Care Options for Early Retirees Act FAQ](#) and [section-by-section](#).

NAPO Meets with Reps. Davis and Graves on Efforts to Move Social Security Fairness Act

On November 18, NAPO met with Congressmen Rodney Davis (R-IL) and Garret Graves (R-LA) and a small coalition of representatives of first responder organizations to discuss the path forward to passing the Social Security Fairness Act (H.R. 141) and repealing the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP). Rep. Davis is the sponsor of the bill and Rep. Graves has made the repeal of the GPO and WEP a top priority issue for his office.

The Social Security Fairness Act currently has 224 bipartisan cosponsors and it is our goal to get to 290 to force a vote on the House floor, much like we did with the Middle Class Health Benefits Tax Repeal Act in July. Reps. Davis and Graves plan on holding regular meetings with our coalition to continue a full-court press to get to 290 cosponsors and make our case that this is a top priority for a large, bipartisan contingent of Congress.

Though most police officers must retire after specific time served, usually in their early- to mid-fifties, many look for new opportunities to serve their community. 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 full support from their rightfully earned Social Security retirement benefit, their pension heavily offsets it, thus vastly reducing the amount they receive.

More troubling is the effect of GPO on a police officer's retirement. If a spouse who paid into Social Security dies, the surviving public safety officer should be eligible for half of the deceased's benefit. However, GPO requires that this amount be offset by two-thirds of the survivor's pension, eliminating most or all of the payment. By professional need, many police officers are outside of Social Security but if they had not served at all, they would receive the full allotment of the spouse's benefit.

GPO and WEP were meant as a "leveling" response but only serve to hurt public safety officers. By totally repealing both GPO and WEP, the Social Security Fairness Act would preserve the retirement security of those who selflessly serve and protect our communities.

NAPO thanks Reps. Davis and Graves for their leadership on and dedication to the full repeal of the GPO and WEP. To find out if your representative has signed on as a cosponsor to H.R. 141 or to get information about the bill, contact Andy Edmiston at aedmiston@napo.org.

NAPO Works to Move PSOB Reform Bill Before End of Year

During National Police Week this year, the Senate passed the Protecting America's First Responders Act (S. 1208). This important legislation would make it easier for public safety officers disabled in the line of duty to qualify for the Public Safety Officer's Benefits (PSOB) Program's disability benefits, in addition to several other important programmatic changes. Since the bill passed the Senate by voice vote on May 16, the bill has been sitting with the House Judiciary Committee, which had shown little to no interest in moving it. With the year coming quickly to a close, we have revamped our efforts to move this important legislation, working closely with the bill's sponsors – Senator Charles Grassley (R-IA) and Congressman Bill Pascrell (D-NJ) – Committee staff and key PSOB stakeholders.

The Protecting America's First Responders Act is so important because the PSOB Program's incredibly stringent requirements for officers disabled in the line of duty have been applied unfairly and inconsistently. These requirements make it extremely difficult for officers to qualify for PSOB disability benefits, and the PSOB regulations regarding disability benefits do not match up with what Congress intended when it created the disability benefit in 1990.

This legislation would ease the strict requirements for disabled officers to qualify for PSOB disability benefits, ensuring that officers who are catastrophically injured in the line of duty, but can perform some level of meaningful work, would still qualify for the much-needed benefit. It would also ensure that beneficiaries receive the highest award amount possible and it will make certain that all children of public safety officers disabled or killed in the line of duty are able to benefit from the Public Safety Officers' Education Assistance program.

Our goal is to have the Committee take up the bill prior to Congress adjourning for the year, which is likely going to be December 20. The one hurdle to this effort is the House impeachment proceedings, which will move from the Intelligence Committee to the Judiciary Committee once the investigation is complete. No matter what happens, there is a strong desire and momentum to move this legislation and we will carry that over into the new year if necessary.

NAPO Supports Bill to Expand HELPS Retirees

NAPO has pledged its support for the Public Safety Retirees Healthcare Protection Act (H.R. 4897), sponsored by Congressman Dan Lipinski (D-IL). In 2006, NAPO played a large role in the passage and enactment of the Healthcare Enhancement for Local Public Safety (HELPS) Retirees Act as part of the Pension Protection Act. This provision provided public safety officers, who often retire earlier than other occupations because of the physical demands and unique job hazards they face, with means to more affordable healthcare options. Under the HELPS Retirees Act, retired public safety officers can use up to \$3,000 annually from their pension funds tax-free, including defined benefit plans and defined contribution plans, to pay for qualified health insurance premiums.

This is important as many law enforcement retirees lose their employer-provided health insurance and are years away from being Medicare-eligible, forcing them to spend their retirement money on health insurance premiums. Unfortunately, health care costs have gone up dramatically since 2006 and the \$3,000 per year permitted under the provision is no longer adequate to cover even half a year's worth of health insurance premiums. The Public Safety Retirees Healthcare Protection Act would increase the amount of tax-free money retired public safety officers can take from their pension funds annually to pay for qualified health insurance premiums to up to \$6,000.

This legislation is a simple fix that would continue the purpose and intention of the original HELPS Retirees Act: to help preserve the retirement security and the health of those public servants who selflessly serve and protect our communities. We look forward to working with Rep. Lipinski to pass this important bill.

Legislation to Fight Fentanyl Importation Reintroduced

Senator Charles Grassley (R-IA) and Congressman John Katko (R-NY) have reintroduced NAPO-supported legislation, the Stop the Importation and Manufacturing of Synthetic Analogues (SIMSA) Act (S. 2764 / H.R. 4963), that would combat the manufacturing and importation of fentanyl from countries such as China and Mexico.

Illegal drug traffickers and importers can circumvent the current scheduling of drugs by minutely changing the formula of a synthetic drug, creating a new substance that is technically lawful, but still highly dangerous and deadly. The SIMSA Act would create an additional schedule – Schedule A – to the Controlled Substances Act to address substances that are significantly similar in chemical composition to and just as addictive and unsafe to the human body as already controlled substances. It would also allow the Attorney General to temporarily or permanently add a drug that meets certain criteria to Schedule A, allowing the government to quickly respond and control these synthetic analogues.

This nation is experiencing a significant drug crisis, which threatens the future of our youth and our country as a whole. According to the National Institute on Drug Abuse, more than 70,200 Americans died from drug overdoses in 2017 and opioids were involved in over 47,600 of those deaths. Many of these deaths were from using synthetic analogues of fentanyl. By allowing these drugs to be quickly added to the Controlled Substances Act and establishing penalties for illegally importing and exporting a Schedule A substance, the SIMSA Act would significantly help law enforcement in their efforts to stop the trafficking and importation of these drugs into the country.

Another key component to law enforcement’s fight against opioids entering our communities is increased penalties for domestic trafficking of fentanyl and synthetic analogues. While the SIMSA Act does not address this, NAPO looks forward to working with Senator Grassley and Rep. Katko to ensure law enforcement is given every tool available to deter and address the spread of this epidemic.

NAPO Backs Bill to Fight Illicit Trade in Tobacco

NAPO supports the Combatting Illicit Trade in Tobacco Products Act (CITTPA), H.R. 1642 / S. 1965, introduced by Representatives Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX) and Richard Hudson (R-NC) and Senators Roger Wicker (R-MS) and Kyrsten Sinema (D-AZ).

In its 2015 report, *The Global Illicit Trade in Tobacco: A Threat to National Security*, the U.S. State Department notes that cigarette smuggling facilitates and funds more serious crimes such as money laundering and the trafficking of humans, weapons, drugs and counterfeit goods. Illicit tobacco directly supports criminal organizations, drug traffickers and terrorists who pose a direct threat to the security of our communities and our nation.

CITTPA would help the United States combat the illicit tobacco trade and the terrorist networks that rely on its profits. It would give the U.S. Secretary of State the ability to withhold U.S. foreign assistance

from countries who are knowingly profiting from the illicit trade in tobacco. It would also allow the President to target individuals found to be engaged in the illicit tobacco trade. Pursuing those who support and profit from illicit trade in tobacco is vital to cracking down on these crimes and defeating the organized crime syndicates and terrorist organizations that threaten the safety of our nation.

NAPO looks forward to working with Reps. Jackson Lee and Hudson and Senators Wicker and Sinema to pass CITTPA.

If you have any questions about the issues or legislation discussed in this issue of the Washington Report, contact Andy Edmiston at aedmiston@napo.org or (703) 549-0775. Please monitor NAPO's website, www.napo.org, and Facebook page: National Association of Police Organizations, and follow us on Twitter at NAPOpolice for breaking news and updates.