

# GIVING THANKS FOR AN OFTEN THANKLESS JOB:

## An Appreciation of Law Enforcement During A Difficult Time

By Matthew A. Peluso, Esq.



*“If you think people are inherently good... get rid of the police for 24 hours – see what happens.” ~ Sylvester Stallone*

**T**imes are particularly tough for law enforcement officers right now. It seems that a day can't pass without a negative incident involving a law enforcement officer dominating the national news. Worse, a lot of this negativity appears to be justified. When the public sees an officer shooting an unarmed suspect in the back, or a “wannabe” cop mistakes his firearm for his Taser, it is not difficult to understand why public hostility towards law enforcement officers is increasing exponentially. Clearly, in the public's mind, a crisis of respect and trust has arisen with regard to the law enforcement community, which is of great concern to those of us who know and represent officers.

As psychologist Michael Friedman, Ph.D., has found: “This lack of trust undermines the legitimacy of law enforcement and creates an unequal society in which some feel comforted by law enforcement while others feel suspicious and distrustful. Members of the community are more likely to feel safe and cooperate in investigations if they trust law enforcement; thus, it is in the best interest of all stakeholders to understand and build trust in law enforcement.”<sup>1</sup> When the law enforcement community and the citizens they serve are at odds with each other, everyone loses.

However, this month provides the law enforcement community nationwide with an opportunity to come together *en masse* and remind the public about their primary and irreplaceable role in American society. In 1962, President John F. Kennedy designated May 15th as “Peace Officers Memorial Day,” and the week in which that date falls as national “Police Week.” The proclamation signed by President Kennedy stated that the day was intended: “To pay

tribute to the law enforcement officers who have made the ultimate sacrifice for our country and to voice our appreciation for all those who currently serve on the front lines of the battle against crime.”

During National Police Week, tens of thousands of law enforcement officers congregate in the Nation's Capital. The National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial is located in Washington, DC and is the nation's monument to law enforcement officers who have died in the line of duty. Dedicated on October 15, 1991, the Memorial honors federal, state and local law enforcement officers who have paid the ultimate sacrifice for the safety and protection of our nation and its people. At the time of dedication, the names of over 12,000 fallen officers were engraved on the Memorial's walls. During National Police Week, new names are added to the Memorial walls every year at a Candlelight Vigil. Currently, there are 20,267 names of fallen officers honored on the Memorial.

According to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, one law enforcement officer is killed in the line of duty somewhere in the United States, on average, every 58 hours. A total of 1,466 law enforcement officers died in the line of duty during the past 10 years. The Memorial Fund serves as a nationwide clearinghouse of information and statistics on law enforcement line-of-duty deaths. This year, 37 police officers have already lost their lives in the line of duty. According to FBI statistics, 49,851 law enforcement officers were assaulted while performing their duties in 2013.

The world watched as over 25,000 officers from numerous countries lined the streets

in a sea of blue to pay their respects to murdered NYPD officers Rafael Ramos and Winjian Liu this past winter. Then, the world watched again as hundreds of thousands lined the streets of Paris in response to the brutal murders of three police officers in the terrorists attacks at *Charlie Hebdo* and a kosher supermarket. The President of France, Francois Hollande said at their funerals: “They died so that we could live free.”

Thus, despite the current negative image of law enforcement officers, violence is directed more toward, than by, police officers. In his remarks at the National Peace Officer's Memorial Service on May 15, 2013, President Obama expressed the duty that all citizens owe to law enforcement officers:

“As difficult as times may be, as tough as the losses may be, your mission does not stop. You never let down your guard. And those of us who you protect should never let slide our gratitude either. We should not pause and remember to thank first responders and police officers only in the wake of tragedy. We should do it every day. And those of us who have the privilege to lead should all strive to support you better -- whether it's making sure police departments and first responders have the resources they need to do their jobs, or the reforms that are required to protect more of our officers and their families from the senseless epidemics of violence that all too often wrack our cities and haunt our neighborhoods.”

In response to the increasing violence against law enforcement officers in this country, the U.S. Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Assistance (“BJA”),

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created the VALOR (“Preventing Violence Against Law Enforcement and Ensuring Officer Resilience and Survivability”) Program in 2010 to help prevent violence against law enforcement officers, and ensure officer resilience and survivability following violent encounters during the course of their duties. VALOR was developed to address the increase in ambush-style assaults that have taken the lives of many law enforcement officers in recent months.

According to the BJA, VALOR provides critical nationwide training and technical assistance to sworn state, local, and tribal law enforcement officers through a variety of delivery mechanisms and conducts and disseminates analysis of violent encounters in various forms, including after-action reviews. Training covers topics including how to anticipate and survive a violent encounter by using “The Deadly Mix” framework (officer, offender, and the circumstances that brought them together), techniques for identifying concealed weapons and/or armed gunmen, high-risk tactical considerations (e.g., active shooters, hostage), and specific threat groups and violent criminals.

In addition, with the increasing danger posed by so-called “home-grown” terrorists, law enforcement will play an increasingly expanded and significant role in protecting the citizenry of our country as the first-responders in the event of a terrorist attack. On the recommendation of the 9/11 Commission, Congress created the

Office for State and Local Law Enforcement (“OSLLE”) in 2007 to “lead the coordination of DHS-wide policies related to state, local, tribal, and territorial law enforcement’s role in preventing, preparing for, protecting against, and responding to natural disasters, acts of terrorism, and other man-made disaster within the United States.”

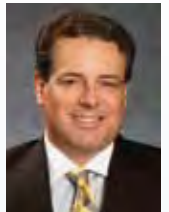
Over the last few years, law enforcement agencies at the federal, state and local level have collaborated in preventing numerous attacks planned by terrorists in this country, and other countries. Further, these are only the foiled attacks that were made public. There are dozens, if not hundreds, of potential attacks about which the public is never made aware. With the serious threat from ISIS and al-Qaeda, the law enforcement community needs to be supported, both financially and emotionally, by the citizens of our country, and unified among its various agencies, in order to protect our country from potential disaster. As all officers know, they are often despised until an attack or potential attack, and people realize how vulnerable we all are without strong and effective law enforcement.

Thus, despite the tragic incidents that have placed law enforcement officers in a bad light over the last year, every reasonable citizen in this country knows that a highly functioning, and fair, law enforcement community is necessary to the well-being of our country. As novelist Brad Thor said: “We have an incredible warrior class in this country - people in law enforcement,

intelligence - and I thank God every night we have them standing fast to protect us from the tremendous amount of evil that exists in the world.” During this month of May, it is important for the law enforcement community to remind the public of that reality.

<sup>1</sup> Friedman, Michael, Ph.D. (2014) “What Happens When We Don’t Trust Law Enforcement? The Importance of Law Enforcement’s Role in Our Society’s Well-Being.” *Psychology Today*. Online. Sept. 09, 2014 published in Brick in Brick.

*Matthew A. Peluso, Esq. is an attorney based in Princeton. He has over 20 years of experience in numerous types of complex litigation, including employment, insurance and business law. Mr. Peluso has successfully represented police officers in employment and contract disputes involving wrongful termination, failure to promote, race, gender and age discrimination, hostile work environment and whistle-blower actions. Mr. Peluso is a graduate of the University of Miami School of Law and George Washington University. He can be reached at: 609-306-2595. His e-mail address is: mpeluso@live.com. His experience can be reviewed on LinkedIn.com and on his firm website: mpeluso@webs.com. The opinions expressed by Mr. Peluso in his article are not intended to provide legal advice. Anyone interested should consult a qualified attorney prior to making any significant employment or legal decision.*



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- May 16th Gary Cornelius (Inmate Manipulation)
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