



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF POLICE ORGANIZATIONS, INC.

Representing America's Finest

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WILLIAM J. JOHNSON, CAE

Executive Director and

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June 13, 2016

The Honorable Barack Obama
President of the United States
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

On behalf of the National Association of Police Organizations (NAPPO), I am writing to you to urge you to restore law enforcement's access to military surplus equipment available through the Federal government. Unfortunately, the June 12th terrorist attack in Orlando illustrates the necessity of this equipment.

NAPPO is a coalition of police unions and associations from across the United States that serves to advance the interests of America's law enforcement through legislative and legal advocacy, political action, and education. Founded in 1978, NAPPO now represents more than 1,000 police units and associations, 241,000 sworn law enforcement officers, and more than 100,000 citizens who share a common dedication to fair and effective crime control and law enforcement.

Fearing for the lives of the hostages that remained in the nightclub during the three hour standoff with the terrorist, Omar Mateen, the Orlando police chief made the difficult decision to storm the nightclub. Using explosives and a BearCat armored vehicle, police broke through an exterior wall to free the remaining hostages. In the earlier firefight with Mateen, an officer's life was saved when the armored helmet he was wearing stopped a bullet that would have most certainly killed him.

One year ago, pursuant to Executive Order 13688, the Law Enforcement Equipment Working Group recommended and imposed extensive restrictions on when state and local law enforcement may access certain lifesaving, federal surplus military equipment. The Department of Defense has since seized such gear from state and local law enforcement agencies and threatened expulsion from the Department's 1033 program altogether if the equipment was not returned on time. Many of the items the Executive Order has restricted are defensive gear, such as riot helmets, riot shields, and armored personal transport vehicles. This gear proved essential to police in rescuing the hostages and ensuring no more lives were lost at the hands of Mateen.

Programs like the Department of Defense's 1033 program and grant programs at the Departments of Justice and Homeland Security have been vital resources in allowing state and local law enforcement to acquire items used in search and rescue operations, disaster response, and active shooter situations that they otherwise would not be able to afford. This equipment has not led to the "militarization" of police, but rather has proven to be essential in protecting communities against violent criminals and terrorists with increasing

access to sophisticated weaponry, IEDs, body armor and sometimes even armored vehicles.

Executive Order 13688 acknowledges that this gear fulfills legitimate police needs, and the lack of such gear “can have life-threatening consequences.” The Executive Order goes on to state that there are concerns that this equipment “could significantly undermine community trust” and thus access to it must be restricted. Rather than putting the safety of officers and the public they serve at risk, that trust could have been preserved through education on the justified need and use of this equipment.

State and local law enforcement are the first line of defense. Given the tragic terrorist attacks in Orlando and in San Bernardino, and the unfortunately high number of mass shootings that have all occurred within the past year alone, it is improper that the federal government has questioned the appropriateness of state and local agencies acquiring such equipment for the protection of their communities.

America’s law enforcement officers work each day to protect and serve their communities, often at great personal risk to themselves. We ask that you give those officers access to the lifesaving gear they need to defend themselves and the civilians they are sworn to protect. Thank you for your consideration and please feel free to contact me at (703) 549-0775.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "William J. Johnson", followed by a long horizontal line extending to the right.

William J. Johnson, Esq., CAE
Executive Director