

**WRITTEN STATEMENT FOR THE RECORD FROM
CONGRESSMAN DAVE REICHERT (WA-08)**

BEFORE THE

**U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY**

**FULL COMMITTEE MARKUP OF
H.R. 365, THE “NATIONAL BLUE ALERT ACT OF 2011”**

APRIL 25, 2012

Chairman Smith, Ranking Member Conyers, and my colleagues on the Committee – thank you for the opportunity to testify today in support of H.R. 365, the *National Blue Alert Act*, introduced by Representative Michael Grimm of New York. As the former Sheriff of King County in Washington State and the current Co-Chair of the House Law Enforcement Caucus, I'm proud to cosponsor this legislation and to recognize the work of the nearly one million sworn law enforcement officers across the nation.

Law enforcement officers and their families understand the inherent dangers associated with their work, but humbly accept those risks in service to our nation. Despite the dangers they face, police officers selflessly give themselves to protecting our communities – every day they put on the badge, they put their life on the line for each one of us. According to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund (NLEOMF), there is an average of over 59,000 assaults against law enforcement officers each year, and an officer is killed in the line of duty every 53 hours in the United States. Moreover, there appears to be an upward trend in unprovoked, ambush attacks against law enforcement officers. Last year, the NLEOMF found that gun-related incidents were the cause of more line of duty deaths than traffic incidents for the first time in fourteen years.

Sadly, in Washington State our communities and police officers are too familiar with this trend and are not strangers to the pain of losing a partner or loved one. Consider recent tragedies in my home state:

- On October 31, 2009, an unprovoked, ambush attack claimed the life of Seattle Police Officer Timothy Brenton who was fatally shot while sitting in his cruiser. The gunman pulled up to Officer Brenton's squad car, opened fire, and sped off. Six days passed before the suspect was apprehended.
- On November 29, 2009, officers Tina Griswold, Ronald Owens, Greg Richards, and Sgt. Mark Renninger of the Lakewood Police Department were assassinated while they prepared for their shift at a local coffee shop. A lone gunman pulled up to the coffee shop and opened fire on the officers, killing all four.

- On January 1, 2012, U.S. Park Ranger Margaret Anderson was fatally shot while setting up a roadblock at Mt. Rainier National Park. The gunman was found the next morning; after dying of hypothermia hiding from authorities in Mt. Rainier National Park.
- On February 23, 2012, Washington State Patrol Trooper Tony Radulescu was fatally shot after pulling over a motorist in Gig Harbor, Washington. Many hours later, the suspect was located but took his own life before authorities could apprehend him.

When an officer is seriously injured or killed in the line of duty, the minutes, hours, or days immediately following the incident are the most tense and dangerous not only for the fellow officers on the force but for the entire community. When suspects flee crime scenes, they pose serious threats to communities; they are often armed and very dangerous, and after killing a law enforcement officer, they may not hesitate to harm innocent bystanders as well. The ability to quickly locate and apprehend a suspect is critical to restoring order and ensuring the safety of the community.

Modeled after the successful federal AMBER Alert program, H.R. 365 will help states create a “Blue Alert” system to quickly disseminate information when a law enforcement officer is fatally injured or killed in the line of duty. Blue Alerts would be issued when a suspect has not been apprehended and poses a serious threat to the community. While a handful of states, including Washington State, have already taken the initiative to develop state-level Blue Alert systems, the federal government can help encourage more states in this effort. H.R. 365 will create a national voluntary Blue Alert program within the Department of Justice and designate a national coordinator responsible for disseminating best practices, voluntary guidelines, and protocols for suspect apprehension to help guide states in the development of their Blue Alert systems. The bill also authorizes the use of existing COPS program funds to provide training and technical assistance to states, and therefore does not increase costs to the federal government to carry out the program.

Establishment of Blue Alert systems throughout the United States will help facilitate the timely apprehension of those suspected of seriously injuring or killing a law enforcement officer. For example, the attacks against the officers from Washington State that I discussed likely would have triggered a Blue Alert had the system been in place at the time. If a Blue Alert had gone out, citizens may have

been able to provide more timely tips to authorities about a given suspect's whereabouts, and police may have apprehended the gunman faster. Most importantly, the Blue Alert would have given the entire public safety community the information necessary to protect themselves and prepare for the next encounter with the potentially violent suspect, once located.

I would like to thank the Chairman and Ranking Member for their support in bringing this important legislation forward for a vote in the Committee. The *National Blue Alert Act* will go a long way toward protecting our communities and keeping all Americans safe. Working in partnership with the states, the federal government can help facilitate the creation of Blue Alert systems across the nation so when tragedy strikes, the public is on notice, and suspects are more quickly apprehended and brought to justice before they are able to cause additional harm to themselves or others.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today in support of H.R. 365; I encourage all of my colleagues on the Committee to recognize the work of our federal, state, local, and tribal law enforcement officers and vote for passage of this vital legislation.