Newtown Officers Honored for Courage

Newtown Police Department officers who were dispatched to the scene of America’s second deadliest mass shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School on Dec. 14, 2012, were honored for their bravery with an award presented by Connecticut Gov. Dan Malloy.

In December, the following officers received the Courage of Connecticut Law Enforcement Award: Patrolmen Will Chapman, William Hull, Mike McGowan, Liam Seabrook, and Scott Smith; School Resource Officers Lenny Pena and Jason Flynn; Detectives Jason Frank, Joseph Joudy and Dan McAnaspie; Sergeants Aaron Bahamonde and Dave Kullgren; and Lieutenant Chris Vanghele.

AFSCME honored members of its own Newtown Police Union, Local 3153, Council 15, who responded to the massacre, with the 2013 Law Enforcement Award.

In Memoriam

The names of three law enforcement officers and AFSCME members who died in 2014 while protecting their communities are being added to the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial. They will be honored at a memorial service during National Police Week in Washington, DC, May 10-16.

Alaska State Trooper Gabriel “Gabe” Rich and Sgt. Patrick “Scott” Johnson were killed May 1, 2014, in the remote village of Tanana, 130 miles west of Fairbanks. They’d gone to arrest a local resident after a disturbance when the man’s son opened fire on them with a semiautomatic rifle. The two died at the scene. The two suspects are awaiting trial, with the younger one facing murder charges.

Det. Douglas H. Mayville of the Albany Police Department passed away April 9, 2014, after a 26-year career. He suffered from Wegener’s granulomatosis that was the result of long-term chemical exposure in the department’s forensics lab. He was a member of AFSCME Local 2841, Council 82.

The names of our AFSCME law enforcement brothers who lost their lives in 2014 are among those of 273 officers that will be added to the Memorial this year. Carved on the Memorial walls are the names of more than 20,000 officers killed in the line of duty, dating back to 1791.

AFSCME is a partner of the Memorial Fund. To donate, go to nleomf.org/AFSCME.
"We need safe staffing levels and to make sure our jobs are not outsourced. That’s why I’m a PEOPLE MVP.”

-Patrick Guernsey
Probation Officer
Minnesota Council 5, Local 552

Join today at AFSCME.org/people or call (202) 429-1021.

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We Must Stand with Law Enforcement Officers

The vast majority of police officers protect and serve their communities with honor, integrity and professionalism. As president of AFSCME, a union that represents more than 100,000 public safety workers, I will always speak out when all officers are attacked based on the actions of a few.

During the past few months, our nation has been engaged in a long overdue but no less difficult discussion about race, justice and the role of law enforcement. Let me be clear. Our union has long stood, unwavering, for the core values of the civil rights movement, with fairness and justice for all paramount among them. We will continue to do so. But our fight for justice and respect extends to all women and men who put themselves in harm’s way every day, especially while in the line of duty as a law enforcement officer.

The members of our union will not condone officers abusing their communities’ trust. But we will always stand with officers across this nation who keep us safe and who strengthen our communities. It is sickening to see law enforcement targeted with violence, as they have been nationwide in recent months.

Just a few days before Christmas, two officers in Brooklyn, New York, were gunned down in an ambush on their patrol car. In March in Philadelphia, a police officer was shot while protecting customers in a video store as a robbery unfolded. He’d stopped in to buy a game for his 8-year-old son, who’d made him proud with good grades. In Ferguson, Missouri, two officers were wounded – deliberate shooting targets while keeping the peace at the protests that have embroiled the city.

In all, 126 officers were killed in 2014, leaving behind wives, husbands and children. These women and men answered a call to service. Every day, thousands more like them suit up to keep our streets safe, knowing full well that they might not make it home after the course of their lives will change indefinitely,” Orr said at a task force hearing in Washington, DC. “For these officers it is our duty to ensure that the necessary services and coverage are provided for.

Improving Police-Community Relations

If you could give the President of the United States advice on how to improve relations between police and the communities they serve, what would it be?

In December, President Obama formed a special task force to discuss such recommendations. Known as the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, it worked over a period of three months to gather recommendations from law enforcement officers throughout the nation. Its goal was to help communities and police trust and collaboration among them.

Two AFSCME members were among those who offered suggestions. Sgt. David Orr, of Norwalk, Connecticut, is a member of AFSCME Local 1727. As a front line supervisor and peer counselor to his colleagues, he recommended extending workman’s compensation to cover post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD.

While many officers will find a way to cope with traumatic situations, he said, some won’t.

“Some will be scarred so deeply that they would find it impossible to go on,” Orr said at the task force hearing in Washington, DC. “For these officers it is our duty to ensure they get the necessary services and coverage they need.”

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their shifts’ end. They guard our homes and businesses. When disaster strikes, they come to the rescue. They face down criminals with automatic weapons – entire arsenals in some cases – while they themselves often carry only a service weapon.

And too often today, the danger they face is because a politician cut funding to their department without bothering to ask what kind of risk that would pose to our neighborhoods. Or a city council thought it would save some money by buying outdated equipment, only to find out that it was a bad deal that put lives in jeopardy.

When it’s not danger they’re facing, it’s disrespect. That comes when police officer pensions are cut. When their collective bargaining rights are revoked. When they’re asked to pay more and more for health care benefits. Or from politicians like the

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Connecticut legislators who refused to provide treatment for post-traumatic stress to the brave officers who responded to the horrific shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School.

And, finally, too often the disrespect police officers face comes from their fellow citizens. When a handful of officers fail to uphold their duties or live up to our expectations, all are vilified in a media circus. Keyboard cowboys think nothing of firing off a tweet disrespecting police, knowing nothing of facing actual live fire.

We expect police officers to size up a dangerous situation instantly and make the right decision every time. We expect them to be social workers. We ask them to be humanitarians.

It is a mistake to think that because they are on the front lines it’s the role of police officers alone to fix the deep-rooted inequalities afflicting too many Americans. But officers must absolutely be active participants in an honest dialogue about the problems rooted in race and poverty that face our nation.

It is our job to figure out a way to make American life more fair and equitable for everyone, and we cannot ignore this opportunity to have a frank conversation that brings everyone to the table. Together, we must confront the difficult truths about who we are as a nation and set a course forward that strengthens our neighborhoods, be they urban or rural.

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the wounds inflicted on their minds, just as if those wounds had been inflicted on their bodies.”

Sgt. Aaron Danielson, of the Fairbanks International Airport Police and Fire Department, testified at a hearing in Phoenix, Arizona, on the effectiveness of citizen police academies in bringing police and local residents closer, to the benefit of their communities.

“When people in our neighborhoods learn about our role in the community, and actually participate in police activities like evidence collection or exercises in making real-time decisions about how to respond to life-threatening situations, they begin to understand,” said Danielson, who is president of the Public Safety Employees Association/AFSCME Local 803. “We also have an open invitation to elected officials to participate, and I think it would benefit them as well.”

The 21st Century Policing task force issued its report to President Obama in March. Among its 63 recommendations were:

• the adoption and use of new technologies to enhance public trust and safety
• the implementation of policies that emphasize de-escalation and discourage provocative tactics
• the establishment of more complete record-keeping of police-involved shootings
• building trust with undocumented immigrants who may avoid reporting crime out of fear of deportation.

It’s up to local and state law enforcement agencies to decide which of these are appropriate for their own communities.

Sgt. Aaron Danielson
THORP, Wisconsin – On April 16, 2012, peanut butter was at the center of an inmate-on-officer attack that, according to a former warden, “forever changed the future for all employees of the Stanley Correctional Institution, in addition to the futures of their families and friends.”

In fact, the future of most public workers in Wisconsin had already changed the year before, when Gov. Scott Walker signed Act 10 into law. The law took away collective bargaining rights from most public workers in the state.

On the day in question, Carrie Seichter, a sergeant at Stanley and member of AFSCME Local 122, had been asked to search the cell of Paul Golden, an inmate serving a sentence for burglary, sexual assault and kidnapping. Golden, who worked in the kitchen, was suspected of stealing peanut butter and hiding it in his room.

As Seichter recalls, she came by early in the morning, on the second floor of a housing unit. At first Golden wouldn’t respond, but soon he came out and went downstairs to the dayroom, where Seichter told him to wait. Golden soon created a commotion, and as soon as Seichter stepped outside the cell, he ran up the stairs charging at her.

“He came at me running and punching and I was holding my arms out,” she recalls. “I think I got, maybe, one swing off. I got knocked unconscious on the floor, on the cement. And then I don’t remember.”

Seichter suffered a concussion, frontal lobe damage and a broken nose. Subsequently, she was diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety and depression.

And yet, instead of offering support, Seichter’s management took advantage of the post-Act 10 environment to further try to break her and her union. After the attack, they tried to push her off workers’ compensation, cancel her prescription medicines, refuse to pay her medical bills. They even tried to pass off her injuries as a pre-existing condition.

But they did not succeed. And they never will.

Seichter still sounds incredulous when recounting her struggle with her employer. After a 13-year career, how could they do this to her?

“They would have let me go with nothing,” she says. “Absolutely nothing.”

But thanks to her union, Seichter survived all these attacks. Because her AFSCME sisters and brothers stood up for her, she’s doing alright.

“If I didn’t have the union I wouldn’t have anything,” she says. “The union has done so much for me that I could never repay the union for everything they’ve done. I mean, without the union people have no chance.”

The AFSCME Public Safety Protection Program (PSPP) provides benefits and protections to law enforcement officers over and above what they receive as members of our union.

The program includes criminal and civil representation, as well as workers’ compensation representation when members are denied medical treatment for on-the-job injuries. And it costs as little as $7.75 per member per month, if a local signs up as a group.

For more information, call 1-800-588-0374 or visit AFSCME.org/psoaa.
Understaffing Concerns in Ohio Prisons

Four correction officers and members of the Ohio Civil Service Employees Association/AFSCME Local 11 were attacked by a large group of inmates in February, the latest sign of dysfunction in a prison system where understaffing routinely threatens the safety of officers, inmates and outside residents.

Injured were Officers Brian McGraw, Larry Patterson, Steve Stutz and Walter Rumer. The attack happened at Ross Correctional Institution, when two officers were sent into a housing unit to transfer an inmate to an isolation cell after he acted violently against an outside visitor. At least 15 inmates were thought to be involved.

In October, OCSEA members took to the streets to shed light on the dangers of understaffing and outsourcing, including security breaches, maggots found in food preparation areas operated by a contractor, and even prison escapes.

Although the Ohio Department of Rehabilitation and Correction has a record number of inmates in custody – more than 50,600 in a system built for less than 40,000 – it has shed 400 correction officer posts in recent years, and ordered the closure of housing units and outsourced food service to Aramark, whose practices led to maggot infestations.

“We need more security staff, an end to the food service contract and an opportunity to be real partners with the department in keeping our prisons safe,” said Christopher Mabe, president of OCSEA and an AFSCME International vice president.

OCSEA has since submitted a proposal to take back prison food service, including lower per-meal costs than Aramark.

Mentally Ill Inmates Pose Challenge to COs

Since the economic crisis of 2008, when many states cut their budgets, many mentally ill individuals are ending up where they don’t belong – in correctional institutions. As more state psychiatric hospitals have shut their doors and fewer beds have been made available, these individuals have failed to get the care they need. As a result, they often get picked up by police and end up in custody of another sort. The responsibility for their wellbeing ends up falling on the shoulders of state and local correctional institutions, which are ill equipped to deal with them.

The problem is so bad that in some facilities, one-third or more of the inmates were severely mentally ill, according to the Treatment Advocacy Center in a 2012 report. Correctional institutions, especially jails, have become de facto mental hospitals, except they’re not equipped or trained to provide the care these individuals need.

“Sometimes I would even commit a crime just to make sure I would get my meds,” Joseph DeRiggi, an inmate at the Cook County, Illinois, jail, told National Public Radio in 2014. “Here, there’s a little more understanding because they know us: ‘OK, DeRiggi, we know what you’re on. You’re good.’ That’s just the way it is.”

It’s not the way it should be. Creating a situation where the mentally ill are trapped inside correctional institutions is unfair to everyone involved and costly to taxpayers. Not only is it expensive to house an inmate, but those with mental problems end up staying longer and coming back more often, and the minor offenses they get charged with further clog the criminal justice system.

Most correction officers are not trained to deal with these individuals. Without adequate training, the status quo creates the potential for real danger to both officers and inmates. States and cities need to take a hard look at their budgets and find practicable ways to provide adequate mental health services.