

CARE FOR POLICE SURVIVORS
ACT OF 1998

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3565) to amend Part L of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 3565

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Care for Police Survivors Act of 1998".

SEC. 2. AMENDMENTS TO PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICERS' DEATH BENEFITS.

(a) NATIONAL PROGRAMS FOR FAMILIES OF PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICERS WHO HAVE DIED IN THE LINE OF DUTY.—Section 1203 of Part L of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 (42 U.S.C. 3796a-1) is amended to read as follows: "The Director is authorized to use no less than \$150,000 of the funds appropriated for this part to maintain and enhance national peer support and counseling programs to assist families of public safety officers who have died in the line of duty."

(b) ADMINISTRATIVE PROVISION.—Section 1205 of Part L of the Omnibus Crime Control and Safe Streets Act of 1968 (42 U.S.C. 3796c) is amended by adding at the end the following new subsection:

"(c) Notwithstanding any other provision of law, the Bureau is authorized to use appropriated funds to conduct appeals of public safety officers' death and disability claims."

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the rule, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MCCOLLUM) and the gentlewoman from Texas (Ms. JACKSON-LEE) each will control 20 minutes.

The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MCCOLLUM).

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks on the bill under consideration.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Florida?

There was no objection.

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, on May 15, less than a month from now, the families of police officers who died in the line of duty will gather on the west front of the Capitol and remember the courage and sacrifice of their fallen loved ones at the 17th annual National Peace Officers' Memorial Service. These grief-stricken survivors will be joined by thousands of police officers and distinguished guests from around this nation. This solemn event marks the conclusion of National Police Week.

Among the most important activities occurring during Police Week are special seminars and programs for the families of police officers killed in the line of duty, including a day of fun for their children at the FBI's training academy at Quantico, Virginia.

I mention this, Mr. Speaker, because it is directly related to the legislation we are considering today, H.R. 3565, the Care for Police Survivors Act of 1998.

This bill will, among other things, enhance the programs available to the families of fallen police officers during National Police Week. It will allow groups like Concerns for Police Survivors, or COPS, as it is called, to expand their current services to these families in crisis. COPS sponsors the Police Week seminars that I just mentioned.

Mr. Speaker, H.R. 35675 makes two simple but important amendments to the Public Safety Officers' Benefits Act which was signed into law more than 20 years ago. The bill will substantially improve the way the families of police officers and firefighters who die in the line of duty are cared for during the most difficult moments of their grief.

First, the bill authorizes the Director of the Bureau of Justice Assistance to expend not less than \$150,000 out of the Public Safety Officers' Benefits program to maintain and enhance national peer support and counseling programs to assist families of public safety officers who have died in the line of duty.

Current law limits or caps the amount the Director can spend for this purpose to \$150,000. This change will not require any new funding. It simply allows the Justice Department to spend more of the funding it now receives on these support services.

The need to assist the families of fallen police officers and firefighters is far greater than the cap will allow. Organizations such as Concerns for Police Survivors and the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation are attempting to reach hundreds of family members each year who suffer the horrible tragedy of losing a loved one employed in public safety. Among the many services provided by Concerns for Police Survivors are grief seminars, training for line-of-duty death notification, and special programs for the children of fallen police officers.

H.R. 3565 will reduce the current backlog of cases pending before the Public Safety Officers' Benefits Office by authorizing the expenditure of PSOB program funds on outside hearing officers. Under current law, the PSOB Office must wait an unreasonably long period of time for the availability of a Justice Department hearing officer to hear the appeal of a family member whose application has been turned down.

By permitting the PSOB Office to use its program funds to pay various expenses related to the appeals of rejected death and disability claims, we will shorten the agonizing wait of family members attempting to be heard on their claims. Again, this change does not increase the overall cost of the PSOB program.

Mr. Speaker, as I said in the committee markup, there is nothing that we can do to fully heal the emotional wounds of husbands, wives, children, moms, and dads caused by a police officer's or firefighter's death in the line of duty. It is a crushing blow. With this

legislation, we can only hope that there might be greater solace found in the most severe moments of otherwise very severe pain. Given the sacrifice public safety officers willingly make in the devotion to their communities, we can do nothing less.

I wanted to thank the gentleman from New York (Mr. SCHUMER), the ranking member of the Subcommittee on Crime, and the other original cosponsors of this bill for their support. This bill was approved unanimously by both the Subcommittee on Crime and the full Committee on the Judiciary.

It is my hope and expectation that the House will approve this bill today and that the other body will work quickly so that the President can put a signature on it in time for National Police Week and the National Peace Officers' Memorial Service. This would be a small but meaningful demonstration of this Congress' support for our Nation's public safety officers and their family.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the work of the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MCCOLLUM) on this legislation, along with the gentleman from New York (Mr. SCHUMER), the ranking member.

So many of us are familiar with the line, "a thin blue line" and the words "an officer down," striking words that we have heard either by way of fiction or fact, tragic words when we hear that someone who has put their life on the line for so many of us has been injured or killed.

I believe H.R. 3565, the Care for Police Survivors Act, is the right way to go. I hope not only do we move this legislation expeditiously but we are able to stand along with those officers as we commemorate this time in May when we commemorate and acknowledge those officers who have given their lives, that we, too, in the Federal Government care about police officers.

I rise, therefore, in strong support of H.R. 3565. This bill would amend a very important and valuable program that pays benefits to the families of public safety officers who are killed or totally disabled in the line of duty.

Mr. Speaker, when I go home to the district, many times I meet with friends of mine who are police officers, many of whom I work with as a member of the City Council of the City of Houston and also as a municipal court judge.

Many times, some of them would say, we have not seen you in some of the tragedies where we would come together and worship, commemorating the loss of life. Certainly that is not a time when I would like to see my friends. But I also have shared with them the agony of funeralizing those men and women who have lost their lives in the line of duty or tragically been injured.

I would like to be able to go home now, Mr. Speaker, and say to them that we are concerned and considerate about those tragic losses. Therefore, in supporting the Care for Police Survivors Act, in addition to cash benefits, we would have, as this program includes, counseling available to these families.

Under current law, there is a cap on the amount that can be spent for such counseling. The demand for counseling services is greater than can be met under the cap, and so this bill lifts the cap.

There is already sufficient money in the Department of Justice budget to pay for counseling for all affected families, so this bill will not require any additional appropriations. The bill is supported by the Department of Justice as well as by the National Association of Police Officers, which represents nearly 300,000 police officers, and the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees, which represents more than 100,000 local correctional officers.

These brave men and women put their lives at risk to protect the rest of us, and the benefits provided under this program are the least we can do in return.

Just a couple weeks ago, one of our deputy sheriffs, a woman, lost her life. A few weeks ago as well, Officer Higgins was shot and was down. She survived, but she is now in a rehabilitation process. I would like to think that this bill would help her and her family go through the next couple of months of her rehabilitation and, yes, her coming back into full force, full activity, and a good quality of life. We must recognize those and those left behind.

So, therefore, I commend the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MCCOLLUM) the chairman, and the gentleman from New York (Mr. SCHUMER), the ranking member, for their sponsorship of this bill, and I urge my colleagues to support it.

Mr. Speaker, I rise in strong support of H.R. 3565. This bill would amend a very important and valuable program that pays benefits to the families of public safety officers who are killed or totally disabled in the line of duty.

In addition to cash benefits, this program makes counseling available to these families—however, under current law, there is a cap on the amount that can be spent for such counseling. The demand for counseling services is greater than can be met under the cap, and so this bill lifts the cap. There is already sufficient money in the Department of Justice budget to pay for counseling for all affected families, so this bill will not require any additional appropriations.

The bill is supported by the Department of Justice, as well as by the National Association of Police Officers, which represents nearly 300,000 police officers, and the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees (AFSCME), which represents more than 100,000 local correctional officers. These brave men and women put their lives at risk to protect the rest of us, and the benefits provided under this program are the least we can do in return.

I commend Chairman MCCOLLUM and ranking member SCHUMER for their sponsorship of this bill, and I urge my colleagues to support it.

Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, I simply want to acknowledge what the gentlewoman has said about listing the strong support the police officer organizations have for this bill. I think the one she did not mention that I want to add to the list, maybe it is a neglect on your list there, is the Fraternal Order of Police. They also have strongly endorsed this bill.

Mr. Speaker, I have no further request for time.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself such time as I may consume.

Mr. Speaker, let me simply say that I am glad that the gentleman from Florida added the Fraternal Order of Police. I think we are safe to say that this bill is supported by a multitude of police and law enforcement agencies and certainly our local communities.

Mr. ETHERIDGE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in support of this important legislation that will benefit the survivors of public safety officers who have been killed in the line of duty.

Sadly, my state of North Carolina has experienced a rash of violence against our brave men and women in law enforcement. In recent months, five officers have been killed in and around my Second Congressional District. These tragic crimes have occurred in our smallest towns and in our biggest cities. It is an outrage that those whose service keeps our streets and communities safe and protects our citizens must pay the ultimate price in the line of duty.

To honor their sacrifices and assist their families, last year I established the North Carolina Law Enforcement Survivors Scholarship Fund to assist the families of my state's officers who fall in service to the people. I strongly opposed the Congressional pay raise this House passed last year, and I donated the raise I would have received to create this fund. The scholarship will help cover costs such as books and room and board for higher education for the children and spouses of these local heroes who make the ultimate sacrifice. This scholarship is the least we can do to honor their memories.

H.R. 3565 represents an appropriate action by Congress to assist the families of public safety officers who have been killed in the line of duty. This bill authorizes the Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA) to spend no less than \$150,000 each year to provide counseling and peer support programs for victims' families. The measure also permits BJA to use funds in its mandatory appropriation to administer the appeals of claims for benefits by the family members of slain officers. I urge the House to pass H.R. 3565.

Mr. Speaker, law enforcement officers put their lives on the line each and every day to provide us with safe streets and communities. Our values demand that we tend to the families of those heroes who sacrifice so much for the greater good.

Ms. JACKSON-LEE of Texas. Mr. Speaker, I have no further speakers,

and I am happy to yield back the balance of my time.

□ 1430

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. LAHOOD). The question is on the motion offered by the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MCCOLLUM) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 3565.

The question was taken.

Mr. MCCOLLUM. Mr. Speaker, on that, I demand the yeas and nays.

The yeas and nays were ordered.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to clause 5, rule I, and the Chair's prior announcement, further proceedings on this motion will be postponed.

ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION ACT OF 1998

Mr. COBLE. Mr. Speaker, I move to suspend the rules and pass the bill (H.R. 3528) to amend title 28, United States Code, with respect to the use of alternative dispute resolution processes in United States district courts, and for other purposes, as amended.

The Clerk read as follows:

H.R. 3528

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Alternative Dispute Resolution Act of 1998".

SEC. 2. ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROCESSES TO BE AUTHORIZED IN ALL DISTRICT COURTS.

Section 651 of title 28, United States Code, is amended to read as follows:

"§651. Authorization of alternative dispute resolution

"(a) DEFINITION.—For purposes of this chapter, an alternative dispute resolution process includes any process or procedure, other than an adjudication by a presiding judge, in which a neutral third party participates to assist in the resolution of issues in controversy, through processes such as early neutral evaluation, mediation, minitrial, and arbitration as provided in sections 654 through 658.

"(b) AUTHORITY.—Each United States district court shall authorize, by local rule adopted under section 2071(b), the use of alternative dispute resolution processes in all civil actions, including adversary proceedings in bankruptcy, in accordance with this chapter, except that the use of arbitration may be authorized only as provided in section 654. Each United States district court shall devise and implement its own alternative dispute resolution program, by local rule adopted under section 2071(b), to encourage and promote the use of alternative dispute resolution in its district.

"(c) EXISTING ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROGRAMS.—In those courts where an alternative dispute resolution program is in place on the date of the enactment of the Alternative Dispute Resolution Act of 1998, the court shall examine the effectiveness of that program and adopt such improvements to the program as are consistent with the provisions and purposes of this chapter.

"(d) ADMINISTRATION OF ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION PROGRAMS.—Each United States district court shall designate an employee, or a judicial officer, who is knowledgeable in alternative dispute resolution