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Office of the White House Press Secretary

THE WHITE HOUSE

FACT SHEET

PUBLIC SAFETY OFFICERS' BENEFITS ACT OF 1976

President Ford today signed H.R. 366, the Public Safety Officers' Benefits Act of 1976, establishing a new Federal program to provide benefits to the survivors of State and local policemen and firemen killed in the line of duty.

HIGHLIGHTS OF H.R. 366

The new law would:

- Establish within the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration an entirely federally funded death benefits program.
- Authorize payment of a \$50,000 death benefit to the survivors of State and local "public safety officers" who have died "as the direct and proximate result of a personal injury sustained in the line of duty." Eligible "public safety officers" would include all persons serving with or without compensation as law enforcement officers (e.g., police, corrections, probation, parole, and judicial officers), or as firemen.
- Provide that death benefits be in addition to any other benefits to which the decedent's survivors would be entitled, except that they would be reduced by payments made under (1) the Federal Employees Compensation Act (FECA) to State and local law enforcement officers for injury or death resulting from apprehending persons suspected of committing Federal crimes or (2) the District of Columbia's statutorily authorized death benefits' program for police and firemen.
- Bar payment of the benefit if the public safety officer's death was the result of his or her intentional misconduct, suicidal act, or voluntary intoxication, or the actions of a potential beneficiary.
- Authorize "such sums as may be necessary" for each fiscal year.

The Department of Justice has estimated an annual Federal cost of \$19.3 million.

BACKGROUND

Legislation to establish a Federal death gratuity program for public safety officers was proposed in partial response to a shocking wave of public safety officer killings and the fact that some officers were inadequately covered by job-related benefits. Although bills were passed by both the House and Senate in the Ninety-second and Ninety-third Congresses, the legislation was never finally cleared for Presidential action.

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The original Administration proposal to provide a Federal benefit to the survivors of public safety officers covered only officers killed as the result of a criminal act. The present legislation expands this scope significantly by providing coverage for all deaths resulting from a personal injury sustained in the line of duty.

The Administration plans to seek appropriations for this program as quickly as possible.

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