

Testimony of
US Capitol Police Officer Matthew A. Tighe
Chairman of the United States Capitol Police Labor Committee
Before the Senate Rules and Administration Committee

Honorable Chair and members of the Committee, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to testify before you today. I'm here not only to speak to you as the Chairman of the Capitol Police Labor Committee but as a police officer as well. As Chairman of the Fraternal Order of Police Labor Committee for the United States Capitol Police, I represent more than one thousand sworn members of our Department. We meet regularly to discuss our experiences on the job. While much of what we discuss relates to traditional workplace issues that face union memberships in the variety of work settings represented by organized labor, we also hear consistent constructive criticism regarding how well we protect those we are sworn to serve. I am proud of my fellow officers' interest in supporting the goals our oath of office sets out for us. They are professionals who want to contribute more.

However, it has become increasingly difficult to stand by idly while the morale of the officers deteriorates. A demoralized police force is incapable of effectively achieving the goals and missions of the Department. Specifically, the officers' anguish stems from a breakdown in communication, accountability, and leadership, which has sewn doubt and distrust in the labor-management relationship.

Open dialogue between the officers and management is critical to ensure a competent and united police force. Unfortunately, open dialogue is absent from the present labor-management relationship. While Chief Morse and I meet monthly and exchange in cordial, spirited, and sometimes effective discussions about labor issues, the amount of communication at all the other levels of the Department is severely lacking. In the past, management officials and union representatives communicated freely at every level, from shop stewards and sergeants all the way up the chain of command to the chairman and the chief. Presently, the Department has pivoted away from this traditional approach, and instead delegated much of their authority to resolve labor issues away from immediate supervisors to human resources specialists and attorneys. When my fellow officers perceive that they have lost input into the system, as is presently the case, they, in turn, lose interest in the Department's direction and effectiveness.

The Union is dedicated to ensuring that the officers' voices are heard, but management continuously ignores the rights of the union and its officers. The Department's choice to yield all decision making authority in labor matters to attorneys and human resources specialists has yielded a new adversarial approach. This adversarial approach has forced the Union to re-establish existing rights and protections that were previously agreed upon. Instead of representing the officers and protecting those who protect the Capitol, the Union is forced to expend substantial resources

The men and women of the United States Capitol Police take great pride in being given the responsibility to protect members of Congress; the Congressional community; and the millions who visit here. Those who are recruited and trained to carry out our vital mission are among the best educated and motivated people I have encountered anywhere in the law enforcement community. They bring intellect and on the ground experience to the myriad tasks associated with securing and protecting everyone within the Capitol complex. I believe we are horribly underutilized for insight and ideas that could support further improvements in securing the Capitol.

The Capitol complex faces a constant threat that is not always easy to detect or identify. To deter and combat threats the Department must be given the adequate and appropriate resources to fulfill our mission. We believe a longer view of the technology and equipment that can significantly enhance

our mission must be taken. Further, that the integration and scalability of the existing and future systems must be given more weight in order to maximize the effectiveness of tax dollars spent while projecting future needs in a manner that will make improvements more affordable and compatible.

In addition to the obvious need for training, equipment and adequate funding to carry out our mission for the Congress and the nation we need you to understand our mission and your cooperation in the performance of our mission. We recognize that often our duties may be viewed as an inconvenience, but they are essential for maintaining the security throughout the complex. An officer needs to stay focused on the possible threat without fear from reprisal for properly carrying out their duties. Due to this ever-changing threat officers cannot passively monitor activity but must be able to take a proactive approach to investigate suspicious activity.

The effectiveness of the individual officers at each of the posts, each of the patrol vehicles and the various support positions around the Department is most affected by their personal motivation. It is dangerous for everyone who relies upon us if we are reluctant to do what is difficult but required. The human factor in our profession is unusually critical because a blind eye or turned head can allow the person intent on harm to bring arms, toxins or other dangerous commodities to the halls and offices of the Capitol campus.

Your police officers must feel that they will be supported by their supervisors, their Chief, the Police Board and the Members when they make good faith efforts to do their job. If they come to a common sense that good efforts are punished by the powers that be, because they feel inconvenienced then more damage is done to our security that you may understand. I urge this Committee and the Congress to regularly publish its support for its police officers who diligently perform their duties as individuals and as an agency. Where inconvenience meets security we must encourage the responsible officers and officials to support security and to recognize those who work to secure those we protect.

I have devoted a lot of my time to our labor relations and mission to protect you. Now I wish to raise a serious issue that is a priority for our members. I would like to highlight is our retirement.

The law enforcement profession is more competitive now than ever. It is critical to the Capitol Police to not only recruit the most qualified personnel possible but also to retain them for the length of their career. One of the greatest deciding factors that an applicant considers when making a decision for employment in law enforcement is the compensation package offered by each agency.

Our goal is to enhance our retirement benefits to be more competitive with other agencies, thus more appealing to potential applicants. In doing so we will not only be able to attract the best applicants but retain the officers that are currently in the field. The cost associated with training a new officer just to have them leave for another agency is wasting the resources provided by Congress and the taxpayer.

In too many instances, the U.S. Capitol Police Department is the recruiting arm for competing local and federal law enforcement agencies. Many young men and women who become U.S. Capitol Police Officers begin to look elsewhere after completing a few years on our Department. I am in the process of gathering what information I can on retention informally through our members.

This very issue faced the D.C. Metropolitan Police Department in the early 1970's when the Congress approved an expansion of its authorized strength. Even with the unprecedented step of authorizing early outs for military personnel who joined the Metropolitan Police Department (during the Viet Nam war), the MPD was unable to reach the new authorized strength because too many new recruits left for law enforcement careers elsewhere after securing a few years of experience. It is a matter of record that the only thing that stabilized the MPD's workforce was the adoption of a 20 year retirement system by the Congress.

Subsequent to Home Rule for the District, the City abandoned the 20 year retirement. The DC Council recently passed the 20 year retirement. You can expect this change to increase the chance of losing officer from our department to MPD as they work to increase the size of their police department and stabilize their police force again.

We recognize the fiscal challenge that this presents but hope to work with all the relevant committees to find an offset and accomplish this goal in the future.

That concludes my statement. I'd be happy to answer any questions.