



NATIONAL SHERIFFS' ASSOCIATION

Written Statement for the Record

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Chairman Garbarino, Ranking Member Thompson, and distinguished members of the Committee:

Thank you for holding this hearing on "When Badges Become Targets: How Anti-Law Enforcement Rhetoric Fuels Violence Against Officers," and for the opportunity to testify.

I am Jonathan Thompson, Executive Director and CEO of the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA), representing over 3,000 elected sheriffs and more than 10,000 public safety officials nationwide. The NSA is committed to professionalism, education, training, and supporting law enforcement at all levels.

Brief Summary

Violence against law enforcement is rising sharply, with record-high assaults and officer shootings. This trend is fueled by growing anti-law enforcement rhetoric, amplified through social media and public discourse, and coupled with harassment tactics like doxing and swatting. This rhetoric dehumanizes officers and puts their families at risk. Federal action is urgently required to protect those who serve our communities.

The Threat and Trends

We see a disturbing rise in verbal and physical attacks. In 2023, 79,091 officers were assaulted with 466 shot, the highest in a decade; and as of October 2025, 285 officers have been shot this year with 38 fatalities, including 58 ambush-style attacks. These are not mere statistics—they represent families living in constant fear. Online platforms have increased coordinated threats, while inconsistent prosecutions embolden offenders.

Contributing Factors and Threats

- Anti-law-enforcement rhetoric normalizes hostility by portraying officers as enemies rather than protectors.

- Digital threats include doxing, swatting, and AI-enabled harassment that escalate risks to officers and their families.
- Lax prosecutorial responses leave gaps in accountability.

Insights on Rhetoric and Violence

Some members of this Congress use inflammatory terms loosely and seek to minimize them. Regardless of party, such language serves one purpose: to incite violence. However, research by Professor Robert Pape of the University of Chicago demonstrates a counterproductive outcome. This rhetoric neither raises more campaign funds nor increases voter enthusiasm. Instead, it motivates individuals and groups who seek justification to attack—whether by beating, stabbing, or shooting—and then seek forgiveness. There should be no forgiveness from this Committee, its members, or any elected leader for such incitement.

I experienced the violence of the 1960s firsthand and understand that words matter and have consequences. Modern examples abound—from Aldo Moro to recent political leaders and extremists using religion to fuel violence. There is no difference between an Ayatollah calling for death to “devils” and an elected official using violent epithets to describe law enforcement. Our 230,000 deputies serve communities daily; while not perfect, they strive for justice—and when they fail, the justice system holds them accountable. But for 900,000 law enforcement officers, equal respect and protection from incitement must come from you. Derisive names only undermine the very people doing your lawful bidding. If leaders fail to act responsibly, the cycle of violence may one day come full circle, and when law enforcement is needed most, respect and support should be their reward—not scorn.

Federal Shortcomings

There is no consistent federal penalty for doxing or swatting law enforcement. Monitoring and reporting systems are inadequate, especially for small and rural agencies lacking cyber capabilities. Accountability for violent offenders is weak, and no national protections exist for officers’ personal information online.

Three Clear Recommendations

1. Pass comprehensive, anti-doxing and anti-swatting legislation explicitly covering law enforcement officers and their families, with mandatory minimum sentences for offenses targeting first responders.
2. Establish a coordinated federal task force (DHS and DOJ) to monitor and respond swiftly to online threats against law enforcement personnel.
3. Increase funding for cyber threat intelligence units, especially in small and rural sheriffs’ offices, and launch a bipartisan national campaign promoting civil discourse and condemning violence against law enforcement and first responders.

Conclusion

When rhetoric dehumanizes, violence follows. Congress must lead now to restore civility, reject hostility, and affirm that violence against law enforcement officers is unacceptable and un-American. The brave men and women who wear the badge ask you to lead—do so now. Thank you for the opportunity to testify; I stand ready to work with this Committee to protect those who protect us all.