

Ronald Zona

Good Morning. My name is Ronald Zona and I am currently the Chief County Detective in the Westmoreland County District Attorney's Office. I am also a retired Pennsylvania State Trooper, having served the Commonwealth for 31 years. When I graduated from the State Police Academy in Hershey at 22 years old, I felt like I was living a dream. I had a great job, was loved and respected by the public, and was able to help people in their time of need. I was also able to protect our citizens by ridding the streets of some violent criminals. Police officers were well respected and valued by society. Over the following years, many high profile events occurred in this country which slowly eroded the trust and affection for the police. This downward slide continued slowly until September 11, 2001. I was a first responder to Shanksville and arrived within 40 minutes of Flight 93 crashing to the ground. I saw things that day and in the following weeks that are still etched in my mind. After this tragedy, police and all first responders were called hero's. I felt I had the best job in the world again. Even though I served the public because I enjoyed it and got satisfaction from helping people, it was also nice to be treated fairly and reasonably, and appreciated once again.

Well it goes without saying that we are in a very different situation today. Many things led us to this point, although I'll argue that the main cause was an 8 minute and 46 second time span in Minneapolis, Minnesota. One officer's knee has seemingly changed the law enforcement landscape forever.

Can anyone imagine going to work every day only to be yelled at, sworn at, shot at, threatened, called killers and racists, and otherwise disrespected? Police Officers not only can imagine that, they live it. It

is a dangerous and deadly time to be a police officer in America, and this attitude can have devastating consequences.

So far this year, 167 peace officers were killed in the United States. That is 20 officers per month, or one almost every day and a half. This is unacceptable. This would not be tolerated in any other profession, but it is looked at as acceptable in law enforcement. Instead of cries to defund, we need to provide more funding to hire and train the best officers we can find.

When I applied for the State Police in 1988, I was 1 of approximately 8,000 men and women who applied and tested. Last year approximately 000 citizens applied. This big drop has caused a depletion in manpower over the years and there is no end in sight. In the Philadelphia Police Department, there are currently 600 vacancies, but there are only 160 cadets in the academy. Police staffing has also reached critical levels in Pittsburgh and many other Pennsylvania cities. Even cities in other states are scrambling to hire officers. The LAPD has 650 fewer officers than they did in 2020. The decline in officers has led to a rise in violent crimes in all of these cities. I can go on and on with similar statistics but the bottom line is we need to find ways to better recruit and retain officers. There is no easy solution to this, but we need to make a career in law enforcement appealing again. We need to offer some incentive to join this dangerous profession. We need to pay our officers well and provide good retirement benefits.

We also need to better fund the training of our officers. I was trained above reproach for 6 months in the State Police Academy, however, the world is forever changing. New laws are passed by you, the legislature. Court decisions are rendered by the judiciary on a daily basis that impacts our actions. Defensive tactics change and equipment changes, all of which changes an officer's response. We need

continuing training to teach us the new laws, and to teach us the ramifications of a court ruling on our future actions.

We need to always be trained in better defensive tactics and methods so we know the best practices at all times. We always need training, and the need never ends throughout an officer's career. We need the newest and best equipment that is available to not only keep citizens safe, but to also keep us safe from danger, and allow us to return home to our families. Too many departments in this Commonwealth, and nationwide, are ill equipped to fight crime at best. Too many have outdated, nonfunctioning, or a lack of proper equipment, but lack the funds to acquire it. One only needs to watch the nightly news to see instance after instance of officers outgunned and outnumbered by violent criminals. It may not be the most popular thing to do right now, but funding of training and equipment is essential to the safety of our citizens and our communities, and the brave officers who serve them.

Thank you for your time, thank you for your service to the Commonwealth, and thank you for your continued support of Law Enforcement.