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May 21, 2020

Hon. Nancy Pelosi
Speaker
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Hon. Kevin McCarthy
Minority Leader
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Hon. Jerrold Nadler
Chairman
House Judiciary Committee
2138 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20515

Hon. Mitch McConnell
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Hon. Chuck Schumer
Minority Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Hon. Jim Jordan
Ranking Member
House Judiciary Committee
2056 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20515

RE: Support of S. 3607, Safeguarding America’s First Responders Act of 2020

Dear Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader McCarthy, Minority Leader Schumer, Chairman Nadler and Ranking Member Jordan,

As State Attorneys General, and the chief legal officers of our respective states, we encourage Congress to swiftly enact S. 3607, the Safeguarding America’s First Responders Act of 2020 (“SAFR”). Our public safety officers risk their lives every day to keep us safe but the COVID-19 pandemic has made their sacrifice clearer. As public safety officers in our states have battled the COVID-19 pandemic, they have put themselves at risk while most Americans were able to stay home.

When public safety officers are called to respond, they do not know whether they are coming into contact with a person who is positive for COVID-19. We have seen harrowing stories about how public safety officers have taken heroic actions to save the lives of others, knowing that they risked infection in doing so.¹ As Tampa Police Chief Brian Dugan said, “There’s no way for a police officer to do their job and not potentially be exposed to the virus.”² And sadly, in many of our states, first responders have lost their lives to COVID-19.

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¹ Washington Post, “Police in several cities test positive for coronavirus, stirring fears of spread among first responders”, https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/police-in-several-cities-test-positive-for-coronavirus-stirring-fears-of-spread-among-first-responders/2020/03/28/b88b17f4-6f9a-11ea-a3ec-70d7479d83f0_story.html (March 28, 2020).

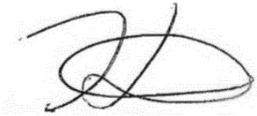
² Id.

When a public safety officer loses their life in the line of duty, there are often many benefits available to their families. Federal law currently provides for the Public Safety Officers Benefits Program, administered by the Justice Department, which provides death benefits to survivors of police officers and first responders who perish in the line of duty or as the result of a work-related event. The program requires evidence linking deaths caused by an infectious disease to work-related activity. In many cases, the origin of an infection can be easily identified, but determining where and when someone contracts COVID-19 in the midst of a global pandemic presents a unique challenge. Inevitable human contact while off duty and delayed manifestation of the disease present problems a family of a public safety officer who dies of COVID-19 should not have to overcome.

SAFR works to overcome this challenge by establishing a temporary presumption that COVID-19 infections will be considered to be contracted while on duty if diagnosed within 45 days of an officer's last shift. The legislation ensures that families of officers and first responders lost while fighting the pandemic do not face unnecessary barriers to benefits they have already been promised.

We applaud the Senate's recent passage of S. 3607, and we urge swift action by the House of Representatives to pass this important legislation.

Sincerely,



Karl A. Racine
District of Columbia Attorney General



Ashley Moody
Florida Attorney General



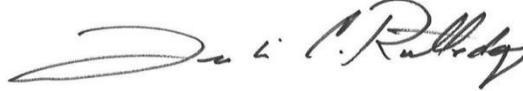
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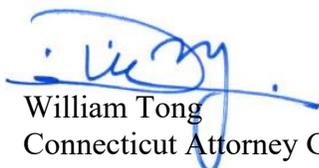
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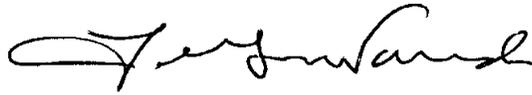
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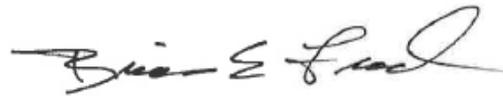
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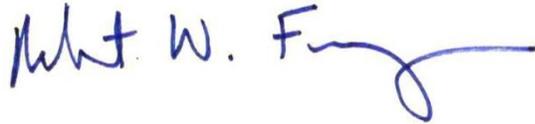
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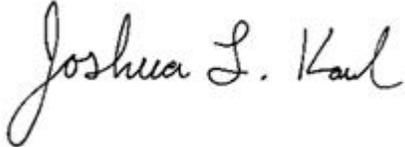


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