

Opening Statement of John McHugh
Federal Law Enforcement Personnel in the Post 9/11 Era: How can We fix an Imbalanced
Compensation System?

July 23, 2003

Mr. Chairman and Chairwoman Davis, I want to thank you for holding this hearing today on an issue of great importance to our Federal law enforcement officers and to those in the communities that they protect. I believe this hearing will provide Members with a comprehensive understanding of the existing challenges in personnel issues affecting federal law enforcement officers. I would like to welcome the witnesses that have been invited here today to testify, with a particularly warm welcome to the senior Senator from our great State of New York, Senator Schumer, and Representative Filner, with whom I have had the great privilege of working on H.R. 2442, the Law Enforcement Officers Equity Act. Mr. Chairman, I appreciate that you have invited a panel of our colleagues to discuss the legislative remedies that are being proposed to address the disparity in pay, benefits, and retirement among officers, in addition to recruitment, retention, work conditions, and quality of life issues related to federal law enforcement personnel.

On a personal level, I am pleased to be a lead sponsor, along with Mr. Filner, on the Law Enforcement Officers Equity Act. I appreciate all of Mr. Filner's efforts and am delighted that he has been invited to speak on behalf of this noteworthy legislation today. This bill has already proven, in the past, to be a widely supported bipartisan bill, boasting of over 200 co-sponsors last Congress. Our efforts are continuing to garner the same level of support for this meaningful legislation in this Congressional session. I deeply appreciate that this measure has been recognized by Committee leadership and is receiving the careful attention and review that it deserves. This legislative process appears to be moving forward, and I am happy to have long been on board for efforts that redefine the term "law enforcement officer," for retirement benefit purposes to include Customs Inspectors, Canine Enforcement Officers, and IRS Revenue Officers.

I have the honor and distinction of representing a district that borders Canada. Many of my constituents are employed by the newly formed Department of Homeland Security. They are federal officers working in the Bureau of Customs and Border Protection and Bureau of Immigration and Customs Enforcement Inspectors. I also represent many of the mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, wives, and husbands of these Officers. We all know that we live in a much different world post 9/11. Like most other federal officers, these officers are issued firearms and body armor to wear while performing their duties protecting the borders of our country. Unlike nearly all other federal officers, however, they are not eligible for early retirement and other benefits designed to acknowledge the danger of this work and maintain the vigorous workforce needed to combat those who spread terror and risk to our society. I am convinced that H.R. 2442, as well as other efforts that will be discussed today, can increase yield, decrease recruitment and development costs, and enhance the retention of a well-trained and experienced workforce. I am committed to achieving these goals by recognizing and properly compensating those Officers who daily risk their lives and personal safety in order to protect and enhance the quality of life and the public safety of those who live and work in my District and the surrounding areas.

Thank you again, Mr. Chairman and Chairwoman Davis for holding this hearing. I look forward to hearing the testimony of our witnesses.