

United States Senate

July 12, 2024

Karhlton F. Moore, Director
Bureau of Justice Assistance
Office of Justice Programs
U.S. Department of Justice
810 Seventh Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20531

Director Moore,

I am writing to express my concern regarding the ongoing delay in processing the Public Safety Officers' Benefits (PSOB) application for Mr. John Barnes, a former Santa Fe Independent School District (ISD) police officer. Mr. Barnes was nearly killed in the line of duty during the tragic mass shooting at Santa Fe High School on May 18, 2018.¹ Despite flat-lining twice as a result of a critical gun wound,² Mr. Barnes is still fighting for the benefits he deserves over **six years** after the incident.

Mr. Barnes demonstrated extraordinary bravery, confronting the gunman, and sustaining a severe shotgun wound that permanently damaged his arm. His injuries have forced him to retire medically from the Santa Fe ISD police department. Despite his sacrifice, Mr. Barnes has been met with bureaucratic hurdles and an unacceptably long wait-time for a decision on his PSOB application.

A recent PSOB report dated May 10 indicated that there are currently 1,432 claims, including appeals, awaiting resolution.³ A separate PSOB report dated November 2023 shows claims pending as long as 2,711 days,⁴ revealing a systemic issue within the program. Mr. Barnes's case exemplifies the urgent need for an expedited resolution given the extraordinary circumstances that led him to retire from law enforcement. It is disheartening to learn that Mr. Barnes's application remains unresolved, contributing to significant financial and emotional stress for him and his family in the aftermath of this tragedy.

For the foregoing reasons, I respectfully urge your office to expedite the processing of Mr. Barnes's PSOB application. A six-year delay is unacceptable, and Mr. Barnes deserves a timely

¹ Jack Healy & Manny Fernandez, *Police Confronted Texas School Gunman Within 4 Minutes, Sheriff Says*, N.Y. TIMES, (May 21, 2018) <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/05/21/us/santa-fe-officer-wounded-john-barnes.html>.

² *Id.*

³ Robert Arnold, *Six years after mass shooting, wounded Santa Fe ISD police officer still fighting for benefits*, CLICK2HOUSTON (May 18, 2024), <https://www.click2houston.com/news/investigates/2024/05/16/six-years-after-mass-shooting-wounded-santa-fe-isd-police-officer-still-fighting-for-benefits/>.

⁴ *Id.*

and fair determination. Moreover, his sacrifices and service to the community warrant proper recognition and appreciation through the timely benefits he is entitled to under the PSOB program.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I am confident that under your leadership, the Office of Justice Programs can address this issue promptly and ensure that justice is served for Mr. Barnes and for all other law enforcement officers who were willing to sacrifice their lives on duty.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Ted Cruz', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Ted Cruz
Ranking Member, Subcommittee on the Constitution
U.S. Senate Committee on the Judiciary