Washington State FOP Statement on HB 2406/SB 6225

With today being the “cut-off” for bills in the Transportation Committees we are disappointed to report that HB 2406 (and its Senate companion SB 6225), relating to the creation of a specialty vehicle license plate to support resources for law enforcement officer health and wellness with a special focus on mental health has failed to be voted out of committee.

The Washington State Legislature and the Department of Licensing provides qualifying charitable organizations like the Washington State Fraternal Order of Police Memorial Foundation the opportunity to pursue sponsorship of specialty plates as a reliable and consistent revenue source to conduct mission-based work. The Washington State FOP Memorial Foundation fulfilled the requirements of the application process to include signatures of support and multi-year marketing and fiscal plans, however the members of the House Transportation Committee, where we focused our efforts, did not vote to pass the bill out of committee which would have allowed the full House of Representatives to consider the bill.

The Washington State FOP Memorial Foundation and the Washington State FOP are disheartened at the legislature’s failure to support grass roots efforts to combat one of the largest crises facing professionals in the field of public safety. Advocacy group Blue Help reported in 2019 there were 228 confirmed law enforcement officer suicides. This marks a 25% increase since 2018 and at a 63% increase since 2016.

The Washington State FOP, in partnership with the Washington State FOP Memorial Foundation have been hosting critical incident stress management trainings (CISM) throughout the state for several years. With the revenue earned from the plate, the FOP desired to build a state-wide network of continually trained peer-support individuals that could be able to respond to any officer, squad, agency or region in need. Knowing that the FOP is not the sole CISM provider or advocate in the area of law enforcement officer health and wellness, the FOP continues to be committed to working with all qualified, effective and inclusive stakeholders in these disciplines in an effort to grow the collective impact of what everyone can achieve.

The most distressing news is the opposition to the FOP’s effort to conduct a charitable activity by other law enforcement and advocacy groups to include; Behind the Badge Foundation, Washington Council of Police and Sheriffs (WACOPS), Council of Metropolitan Police and Sheriffs (COMPAS), Washington State Patrol Association (WSPTA) and Washington State Patrol Lieutenants and Captains Association. In public testimony these groups stated their opposition was centered around the potential threat to the revenue earned from the Law Enforcement Memorial plate (LEM) sponsored by Behind the Badge.

In response to those concerns, the FOP advocated for the drafting of an amendment that would have allowed the state legislature to consider appropriating funds to the sponsor of the LEM plate if the Department of Licensing (DOL) determined that the LEM plate had seen a significant decline in performance with the addition of another license plate to support law enforcement officers in the market. The proposed amendment would have elevated the importance of the Behind the Badge Foundation and LEM plate sponsor. Alarmingly, support for the amendment that would have directly addressed and resolved the publicized concerns was rejected by the LEM plate sponsor and other labor groups. The refusal to work towards a solution that addressed fears stated in public testimony implies that the desire to collaborate and find compromise was disingenuous.

Since its introduction HB 2406 brought new and significant awareness of law enforcement mental health and wellness to include the impact of trauma exposure and risk of suicide. It was courageous of the FOP and all of the supporting panelists to break the stigma and tell their stories to the legislature. With the increased awareness came more legislative efforts to provide additional resources related to law enforcement officer health and wellness. However, Washington State FOP firmly believes that this issue cannot be adequately addressed with additional FTEs and a taskforce or small appropriation of grant funds to be administrated by Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police (WASPC) alone. There must be a multi-disciplinary approach to address such a complex issue and it requires a response that has the cultural competency of peer-based support. That’s why we supported all three efforts.

The Washington State FOP remains committed to supporting all officers of the state on issues related to law enforcement officer health and wellness with a special focus on mental health and will continue to pursue its mission to build a peer support network that can be there for all law enforcement.

This philosophy was best stated in our letter to Behind the Badge dated 1/13/20;

“The scarcity mindset that there is not enough support, heart and understanding to go around doesn’t seem fair. It serves to reinforce a culture of isolation that contribute to the dangerous stigmas about mental health that perpetuate silence and resistance in seeking help. Growing, not limiting the voice of the supporters towards law enforcement officer health and wellness and being the champions of law enforcement shines light on the challenges of the job, the need for resources and honors those who serve.”