

U.S. Attorney's Report to the District

Police Officers and Lethal Force

Last year, during an encounter on federal land in Nevada County, a man drew a revolver on a BLM ranger and a CHP officer who were responding to an illegal campsite. In the ensuing gunfight, all three participants were wounded. Fortunately, all survived. The man with the revolver was prosecuted by this office, in a case handled by Assistant U.S. Attorneys Heiko Coppola and Michael McCoy. This month, following a jury trial in federal court in Sacramento, the man was convicted of two counts of assaulting a federal officer and an officer assisting a federal officer, and one count of use of a firearm during a crime of violence. When he is sentenced later this year, he is looking at many years in prison. While that case is concluding, it is an example of the stubbornly high level of violence perpetrated against members of law enforcement.

Violent crime rates nationally have been steadily declining in recent years, but not violent crimes directed at police officers. According to statistics compiled by the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund, the 126 officer fatalities nationwide in 2014 was a significant increase over 2013, and the number of officers who died from shooting deaths was way up. NLEOMF reports that, of those officers who died from gunfire in 2014, ambush-style attacks were the leading cause of such deaths. The nation took notice of just such an attack which resulted in the deaths of two New York City police officers in December. Violence against law enforcement officers often comes unexpectedly and officers today are more likely than in past years to face heavily armed assailants, often with semi-automatic firearms. Tragically, such was the case in Sacramento last October, when Sacramento Sheriff's Deputy Danny Oliver and Placer County Sheriff's Detective Michael Davis, Jr., were killed.

Threats against law enforcement appear to be increasing. Extremists, both domestic and international, have specifically called for violent acts against members of law enforcement.

Reducing officer fatalities will require long term effort on multiple levels. We must do more to prevent the flow of high capacity firearms into the hands of criminals, to build trust between law enforcement agencies and the communities they serve, and to provide law enforcement with the tools they need – such as training, intelligence, and body-worn cameras – to prevent and investigate violence against law enforcement officers. When this office can play a role by prosecuting violent offenders, we will do so.

If you would like to communicate with our office, contact the main number in Sacramento, or submit a suggestion by clicking on the button below. Thank you.

United States Attorney

Benjamin B. Wagner