



**Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training**

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Date: December 23, 2009

Subject: **Statement of Justification – SAFE Driving Campaign**

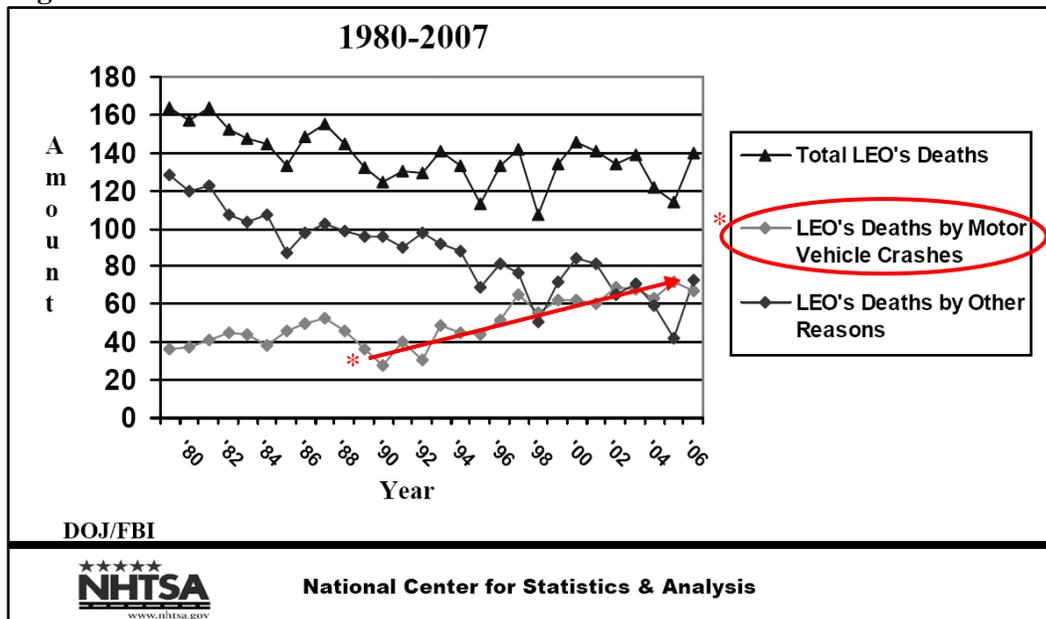
Executive Summary

Traffic collisions are the greatest lethal threat law enforcement officers (LEOs) encounter today. No coordinated national effort exists to address this threat. A reduction of 15% in fatal LEO traffic collisions could save taxpayers more than \$16,000,000.00 annually. The California Commission on Peace Officer Standards and Training (CalPOST) has undertaken a SAFE (Situation-Appropriate, Focused, and Educated) Driving Campaign to reduce the number of LEOs killed and injured in traffic collisions. SAFE Driving Campaign research and activities proposed by CalPOST will save lives and money. This document details the factual justification for the campaign.

Fatal On-Duty Traffic Collisions – Prevalence

On-duty traffic collisions are the leading cause of death for LEOs in California and nationally.<sup>1</sup> In terms of LEO deaths, traffic collisions have been the leading cause since the mid-1990s (above all other accidents and felonious assaults). Figure 1—prepared by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) (with emphasis added by CalPOST)—clearly presents this trend (although it excludes motorcycle and pedestrian LEO deaths).

**Figure 1 – Officer Deaths<sup>2</sup>**



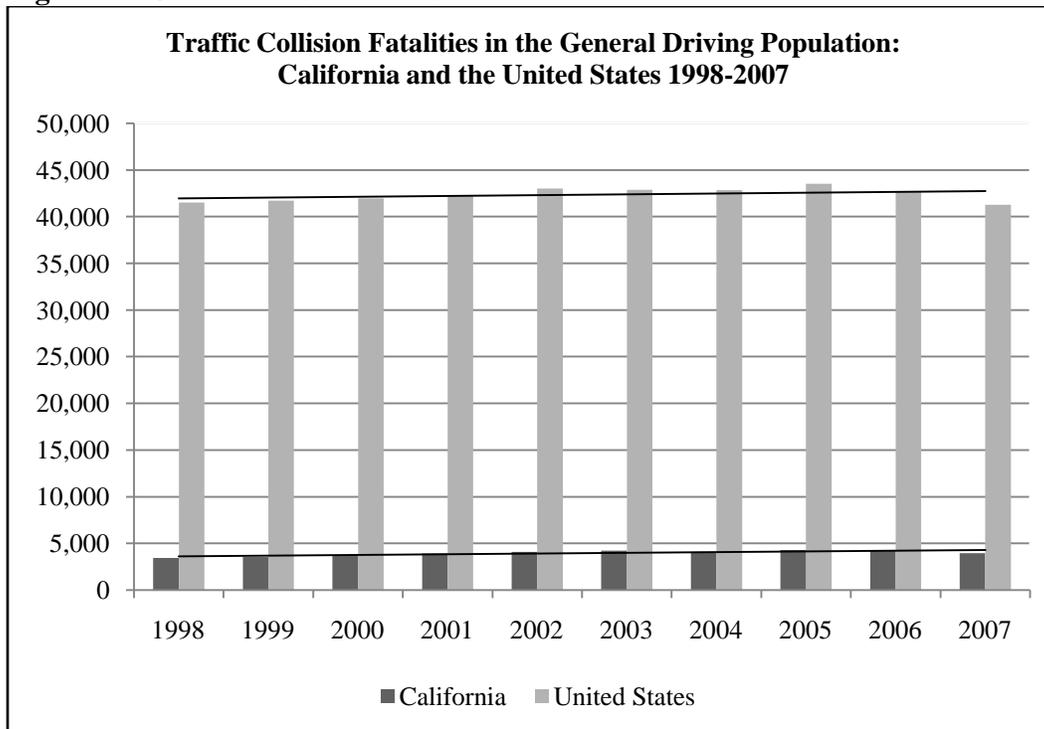
\*Trend-line and oval in red added by CalPOST for emphasis.

**THE MOST DANGEROUS AND LETHAL ENVIRONMENT FOR LEOs NATIONWIDE IS TRAFFIC.**

By comparison, this persistent increase in fatal LEO collisions (estimated at “approximately 80%” between 1980 and 2007<sup>3</sup>) stands in stark contrast to the trend in the general public. Over the past

decade, fatal collision rates in the general driving populations in California and the United States as a whole have experienced little appreciable change as indicated in Figure 2.

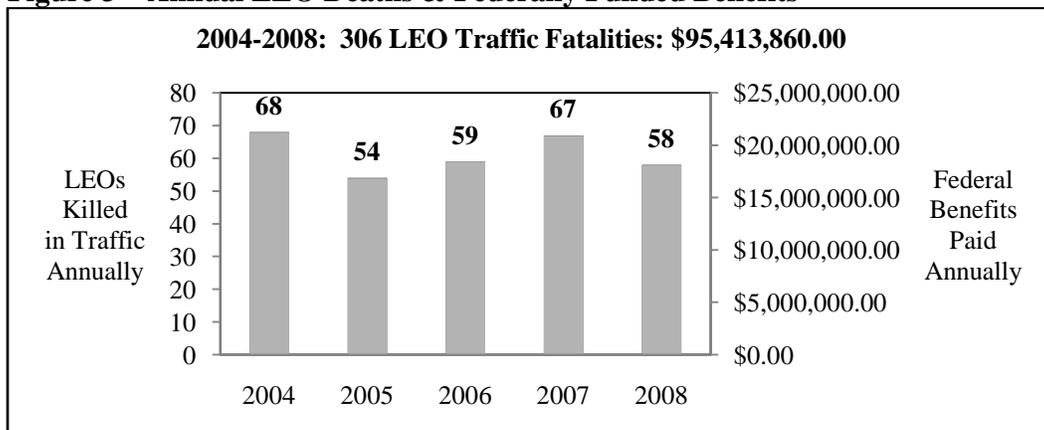
**Figure 2 – General Public Deaths<sup>4</sup>**



Fatal On-Duty Traffic Collisions – Costs

LEO deaths from traffic collisions cost the federal, state, and local governments more than \$100,000,000.00 each year.<sup>5</sup> Among the smallest costs—but one of the most dramatic—is the Public Safety Officers’ Benefits Program, which pays \$311,810.00 tax free to the survivor/beneficiary of each LEO killed in the line of duty.<sup>6</sup> Considered in aggregate, this amounts to tremendous sums over just a few years as illustrated in Figure 3.

**Figure 3 – Annual LEO Deaths & Federally Funded Benefits<sup>7</sup>**



Although these numbers are substantial, the full economic cost of collisions includes many more factors. In consideration of this, NHTSA published *The Economic Impact of Motor Vehicle Crashes* in 2000 (Report #: DOT HS 809 446).<sup>8</sup> This report considered Emergency Services, Market

Productivity, Legal/Court, and Property Damage costs among others to quantify the "total" average cost of a fatal traffic collision. In sum, the NHTSA report indicates that, as of 2000, each fatal collision costs an average of \$977,000.00. Additionally, the report indicates an average growth in costs of approximately 4.8% annually since 1975. Therefore, the average cost of a fatal collision in 2009 would be approximately \$1,489,862.00. Finally, the NHTSA report indicates an estimated 9% of the total cost of a fatal collision is covered by public revenues for the general driving public. In the case of on-duty LEOs however, it is more likely that *all* of the costs would be covered by public revenues. These costs are in addition to the \$311,810.00 survivor benefit. In this case, the 306 LEO traffic fatalities identified above (2004-2008) have an estimated total *public* cost in excess of half a billion dollars (\$551,311,632.00).

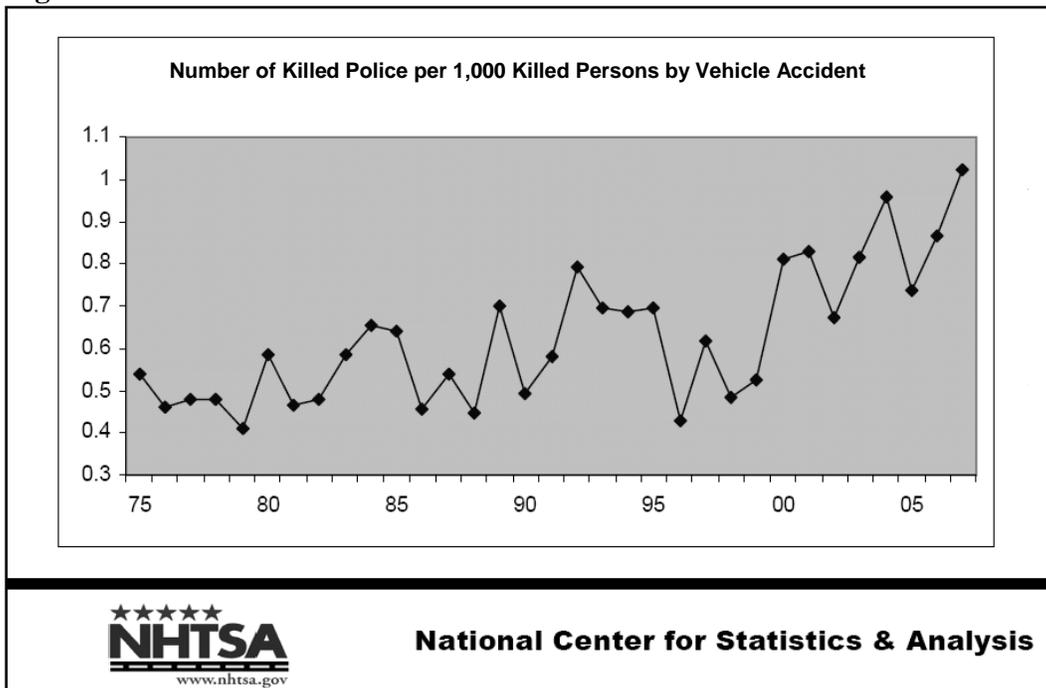
**A FATAL LEO TRAFFIC COLLISION IN 2009 WILL COST THE PUBLIC APPROXIMATELY \$1,801,672.00.**

Most important are the grief and personal losses felt by the families, friends, colleagues, and communities of fallen officers. This is immeasurable. Additionally, innocent citizens (bystanders/motorists) frequently incur personal and financial losses in the form of emotional trauma, personal injuries, and property damage as a result of LEO traffic collisions. These highly significant costs are difficult to capture statistically.

Common Misconceptions

Two common misconceptions relative to LEO traffic collision deaths persist. The first stems from an intuitive belief that there are more LEOs (now than in the past) and therefore there will be more fatalities. Although logical, this does not explain the increase. Figure 4—prepared by NHTSA—shows the number of LEOs killed in relation to the number of people killed (in traffic collisions) from 1975-2007. This comparison controls for population changes and illustrates that LEO traffic collision deaths are actually increasing per capita.

**Figure 4<sup>9</sup>**



## Statement of Justification – SAFE Driving Campaign

There is no nationally coordinated effort to understand and address LEO traffic-related deaths. The misconception is that one exists. Although NHTSA has documented the prevalence of these fatalities, no program or research is underway or planned. The same is true of the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). NIOSH identified traffic collisions as a primary workplace threat to LEOs and, as part of its 2009 National Occupational Research Agenda (NORA), it set a goal to “Reduce traumatic injuries and fatalities resulting from vehicle collisions involving law enforcement personnel by 15% by 2015.”<sup>10</sup> Still, no program, research, or other initiative exists at NIOSH to actually advance this goal. Similar examples persist at the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) and the National Institute of Justice (NIJ).

### Conclusions

CalPOST is actively advancing its SAFE (Situation-Appropriate, Focused, and Educated) Driving Campaign. The campaign includes stakeholders from across the nation. The emphasis is to save lives by raising awareness and taking decisive actions in law enforcement training and policy. Through empirical research and validated training and policies, law enforcement officers in every state will benefit from the efforts of the SAFE Driving Campaign.

### Contact for Questions or Comments

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<sup>1</sup> Several sources confirm these facts. Among them are: (1) data from the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial Fund “Drive Safely” program: <http://www.nleomf.org/programs/drive/>; (2) the Federal Bureau of Investigation Law Enforcement Officers Killed and Assaulted report: <http://www.fbi.gov/ucr/killed/2008/index.html>; (3) data collected from the California Peace Officers’ Memorial: <http://camemorial.org/index.php>; and (4) the CalPOST Driver Training Study: Volume I: [http://www.post.ca.gov/Publications/Driver\\_Training\\_Study/](http://www.post.ca.gov/Publications/Driver_Training_Study/).

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from Slide 7 of “Summary of a Police Fatal Crash” by James D. Bean, NHTSA, Crash Investigation Division, presented at the Association of Professional Law Enforcement Emergency Vehicle Response Trainers International Conference September 15, 2009, Daytona Beach, FL.

<sup>3</sup> As reported on Slide 10 of “Law Enforcement Officers Killed & Assaulted” by Charles Miller, Federal Bureau of Investigation, Law Enforcement Officers Killed & Assaulted Division, presented at the International Association of Chiefs of Police Conference October 5, 2009, Denver, CO.

<sup>4</sup> Compiled by CalPOST: California statistics from the California Highway Patrol Statewide Integrated Traffic Reporting System: <http://www.chp.ca.gov/switrs/xls/2007-sec1.xls>; National statistics from the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration Fatality Analysis Reporting System Encyclopedia: <http://www-fars.nhtsa.dot.gov/Main/index.aspx>.

<sup>5</sup> This figure is based on (a) NHTSA estimated cost of a fatal traffic collision 2000; (b) increase of 4.8% annual to adjust for 2009; (c) addition of PSOB amount (per officer); and (d) averaged for LEO fatalities 2004-2008.

<sup>6</sup> Public Safety Officers’ Benefits (PSOB) Program: [http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA/grant/psob/psob\\_main.html](http://www.ojp.usdoj.gov/BJA/grant/psob/psob_main.html).

<sup>7</sup> Compiled by CalPOST: “LEOs Killed in Traffic Annually” based on FBI LEOKA reports 2004-2008; “Federal Benefits Paid Annually” derived by multiplying LEOs killed times the PSOB amount of \$311,819.00.

<sup>8</sup> Available online: <http://www-nrd.nhtsa.dot.gov/Pubs/809446.PDF>.

<sup>9</sup> Adapted from Slide 36 of “Summary of a Police Fatal Crash” by James D. Bean, NHTSA, Crash Investigation Division, presented at the Association of Professional Law Enforcement Emergency Vehicle Response Trainers International Conference September 15, 2009, Daytona Beach, FL.

<sup>10</sup> From Page 14 of the NIOSH April 2009 NORA for Public Safety; available online: <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/nora/comment/agendas/pubsafsub/pdfs/PubSafSubApr2009.pdf>.