Last week, beneath gray skies accented by a light drizzle, I stood before the impressive circle of stone pillars that make up the Connecticut Law Enforcement Memorial, where the names of police officers who lost their lives in the line of duty are etched into state history. Governor Lamont was on hand to sign into law a bill that codified details of a proposal I championed a year earlier, one that provides a non-taxable payment of $100,000 to the surviving family members or beneficiaries of any Connecticut local or state police officer killed in the line of duty.

It’s called the Fallen Officer Fund, and while the concept was born from conversations that I had with law enforcement officers following the horrific line of duty deaths of two Bristol police officers in 2022, its finer details, reflected in Public Act 24-27, are a product bipartisan support and collaboration with the Office of the State Comptroller.

Last spring, I worked to get the program—and dollar amount—established through the process to develop the two-year state budget. From there, I began communicating with Comptroller Sean Scanlon about building the administrative architecture for the fund. Eventually, another key component was developed and made part of the bill signed into law last week. The provision, driven by suggestions from the law enforcement community, provides a pathway for surviving family members to remain on the fallen officer’s health insurance for up to five years.

Taken together, these measures offer critical financial and health security during what is undoubtedly an unimaginably difficult time for a fallen officer’s loved ones. This benefit will give families breathing room to heal and rebuild their lives with reduced financial pressure.

For me, it’s the least the state can offer to the individuals who put their lives on the line to keep our communities safe. It’s a promise that we will never forget the sacrifices made by their loved ones.

At the bill signing at the Memorial in Meriden, the interim police chief from Bristol was on hand along with the chief from the Hartford Police Department. Both spoke of the positive impact this program will have on officers who would have to worry just a little bit less about how their families would be taken care of should the unimaginable occur.

Detective Bobby Garten, from the Hartford Police Department, was killed in the line of duty last fall when his police cruiser was struck by a car fleeing a separate traffic stop. At the ceremony, it was explained that his loved ones were the first beneficiaries from the Fallen Officer Fund.

Anyone who follows state government closely knows that there are sharp divides between Republicans, Democrats, and the Governor when it comes to policy surrounding criminal justice and policing. I’m thankful, though, that on this issue those differences were shifted to the background. The spirit of bipartisanship that drove this bill as well as another passed during the recent session that clarifies the meaning of “in the line of duty” for those who serve, whether it be a police officer or firefighter, is typical of most of the work we perform in Hartford.

I’ve often said that our legislature does its best work when its members work together. This bill is a powerful example of that, and I’m glad that our work over the last year will help a family when the inevitable event of a next tragedy.

**Rep. Vincent Candelora
House Republican Leader
86th Assembly District
North Branford, Durham, East Haven, Guilford**