

# *Protecting Communities And Police Act*

A bill by U.S. Sen. Claire McCaskill to better protect police officers and the communities they serve,  
**and supported by both the National Tactical Officers Association and the NAACP.**

*“The bottom line is, this equipment saves lives, but these programs need reform.  
And that’s exactly what this bill would do.” – McCaskill*

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## **What does the bill do?**

- ✓ Reforms federal programs to strengthen oversight/coordination when giving equipment/funding to local police
- ✓ Brings local elected officials into the process
- ✓ Imposes minimum training requirements
- ✓ Improves data collection on the use of military-grade weapons and SWAT teams

**More specifically (click [HERE](#) for a full section-by-section summary and [HERE](#) for the bill text):**

**Task Force to Determine Law Enforcement Equipment.** Creates a task force to work with Departments of Defense, Homeland Security, and Justice—to determine what equipment is suitable for law enforcement, what should be prohibited, and what should require higher-level approval/local input—composed of agency representatives, law enforcement associations, state/local elected officials, an expert in criminology/criminal justice, and representatives from civil rights organizations.

**Body Cameras, Dashboard Cameras, and Gun Cameras.** Sets aside 5% of grant funding from the DOJ Byrne-JAG grant program for the purchase and maintenance of body cameras, dashboard cameras, gun cameras, and storage of footage.

**Data Collection.** Sets up DOJ to collect and analyze data on the use and deployment of SWAT teams.

**Publication and Local Approval.** Requires a law enforcement agency to publish its request and obtain approval from the law enforcement agency’s state or local executive prior to submitting a request for grant funding for certain purposes and requests (e.g., tactical vehicles, camouflage, weapons over a certain caliber, grenades and flash bang grenades).

**Whistleblowers/Public Hotlines.** Establishes whistleblower protections, public hotlines for misuse of grant funding/equipment.

**Small Agencies.** Restricts law enforcement agencies with fewer than 10 sworn full-time law enforcement officers from purchasing or obtaining a tactical military vehicle if the law enforcement agency already has 1 or more.

**Small SWAT Teams.** Requires SWAT teams to be composed of at least 17 officers and chosen from law enforcement agencies with more than 35 full time sworn officers in order to be eligible for funding and equipment. Law enforcement agencies with fewer than 35 officers may form regionalized SWAT teams to meet this requirement.

**Video Recording.** Requires law enforcement that receives cameras to establish policies for use, retention, and chain of custody.

**Consent Decrees.** Prevents law enforcement agencies that are under consent decrees by the DOJ for civil rights abuses or excessive use of force from receiving most weapons or funding to procure weapons without the approval of DOJ.

**Trainer Certification and Training Requirements.** Requires states to establish programs to certify law enforcement trainers. Establishes annual training requirements for law enforcement officers, including training for deployment of SWAT teams.

**Reporting Requirements.** Requires requests for grants/equipment to provide additional details on need.

## Who's supporting the bill?

**National Tactical Officers Association**—representing law enforcement in all 50 states including more than 1,600 tactical teams (letter available [HERE](#)):

*“The National Tactical Officers Association is a strong supporter of the measure as introduced by Sen. McCaskill. All can agree that there is a need for increased transparency and accountability in these federal programs that are providing needed resources for law enforcement. We applaud Sen. McCaskill for her leadership on this issue and look forward to continuing to work with her on this.”* - Mark Lomax, Executive Director

**The NAACP:**

*“Much work needs to be done to rebuild trust and the perception of integrity between many communities and their local law enforcement, and this legislation is a great leap forward. Folks need reason to believe that their police departments are working to protect public safety, but also to respect the rights of citizens, and the Protecting Communities and Police Act would install the right mix of accountability and oversight to bring us closer to that goal. This bill moves us steps ahead in the right direction away from the paradigm of military style policing and towards civilian based community law enforcement.”* – Hilary Shelton, the Director of the NAACP Washington Bureau and the Senior VP of Policy and Advocacy

**St. Louis County Chief of Police Chief Jon Belmar:**

*“Every day law enforcement officers walk a fine line keeping our communities safe- we must maintain the trust of our communities while being aware of and prepared for the dangers we may face. Sen. McCaskill understands that delicate balance. That is why I support her Protecting Communities and Police Act. The bill ensures that law enforcement will continue to have access to life saving equipment, but it brings more public awareness to these programs, and that transparency is essential to building and maintaining trust.”*

**St. Louis Chief of Police Sam Dotson:**

*“Officers risk their lives each day to protect and serve the citizens of St. Louis; however we know we can't do our job alone. Strengthening the relationship between the department and the community through fair and transparent policing is paramount to solving crimes and keeping citizens safe. Senator McCaskill's Protecting Communities and Police Act ensures that oversight of policing remains in the hands of state and local officials while improving the coordination of federal programs that provide law enforcement with life-saving equipment. I look forward to working with Senator McCaskill to see this bill become law.”*

**Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis** (letter available [HERE](#)):

*“I write to you today in enthusiastic support of the Protecting Communities and Police Act. Policing in the United States is an inherently local issue, but the federal government has been providing law enforcement with ever-increasing amounts of funding and equipment. As a result, it too must take responsibility for providing the coordination and oversight necessary to ensure that law enforcement agencies are responsible stewards of community safety and adequately trained in the use of the equipment they receive. The Protecting Communities and Police Act will provide that oversight.”* – Michael P. McMillan, President and CEO

**Kansas City Chief of Police Darryl Forté:**

*“I support Senator McCaskill's effort to pass the Protecting Communities and Police Act. It maintains law enforcement's access to life-saving equipment while improving oversight of the federal programs that provide this equipment. That balance that can help to restore the relationship between some communities around the country and the law enforcement agencies that protect them.”*

**The Reverend Starsky D. Wilson, co-chair of the Ferguson Commission and President and CEO, Deaconess Foundation** (letter available [HERE](#)):

*“Unfortunately, the St. Louis region and the city of Ferguson have been joined by the people of Cleveland, Staten Island, Beaver Creek, North Charleston and Baltimore in deep distress regarding the relationship between the community and law enforcement... With these things in view, I am pleased to have reviewed and am writing to express my full support of the proposed ‘Protecting Communities and Police Act.’”*

**U.S. Congressman Lacy Clay** (Mo.-1)—who is introducing companion legislation in the U.S. House:

*“I'm very pleased to join with my great friend and colleague Senator McCaskill to introduce the companion legislation in the U.S. House. Our bill directly addresses the excessive militarization of local police, which I witnessed first-hand in Ferguson. It will also mandate new standards for sensitivity training to help officers interact more effectively with racially & ethnically diverse communities, new immigrants, the mentally ill, and disabled Americans. This enhanced training will protect both the public and police officers by helping to deescalate volatile situations before they lead to the use of force.”*

## **What went into the bill?**

**August, 2014:** Teenager Michael Brown is shot and killed by a Ferguson, Mo. police officer, leading to public demonstrations, and local and federal investigations.

**September, 2014:** McCaskill leads a Senate Homeland Security Committee hearing titled “Oversight of Federal Programs for Equipping State and Local Law Enforcement” – a hearing that, in conjunction with further research, finds that:

- The equipment and funding provided by the federal government to local law enforcement can and has saved the lives of police officers but training, leadership and oversight are needed to ensure the equipment is not misused;
- The federal government lacks comprehensive, nationwide data and information on the amount and types of weapons and equipment being purchased using federal funding, and the use and deployment of those weapons, particularly by SWAT teams;
- There has been a proliferation of SWAT teams to even the smallest law enforcement agencies, some which may not have the financial resources or technical capacity to maintain a full-strength SWAT team;
- There is a lack of oversight of police trainers, and a need to ensure that law enforcement agents receive professional, responsible training;
- While policing, and oversight of policing, is an inherently local function in the United States, the use of federal programs by law enforcement to purchase or directly obtain certain items without local community knowledge or local political input results in local oversight over only a portion of law enforcement budgets and equipment, and oversight by the federal government of its programs has been lacking.

**October 2014 – April 2015:** McCaskill conducts outreach and receives input from local and national stakeholders, including:

- National Tactical Officers Association
- NAACP
- St. Louis County Police Department
- Kansas City Police Department
- Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis
- Deaconess Foundation
- Fraternal Order of Police
- Department of Defense
- Department of Homeland Security
- Department of Justice
- ACLU
- National Sheriffs’ Association