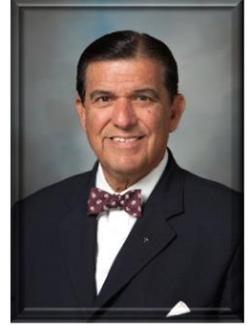




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OPINION EDITORIAL: Remembering our Peace Officers in these Most Challenging Times

By Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr. (D-Brownsville) - May 13, 2020

This week marks the 58-year anniversary of President John F. Kennedy's 1962 proclamation designating May 15 as Peace Officer Memorial Day, and the entire week of when this day falls on Police Officer Week. In almost six decades, communities across our nation have joined to pay tribute to the local, state, and federal peace officers who lost their lives, or became disabled, in the line of duty. As our state strives to overcome the COVID-19 outbreak, this year's remembrance of those who put themselves in harm's way to protect our families takes on an even more commendable meaning. During these challenging times, we pay special recognition to our peace officers and thank them for their tireless dedication to our safety and for their public service to our communities.

Unlike any other Peace Officer Memorial Day in history, this year's celebration takes on a more special meaning as our communities across our nation celebrate this special day and week while adhering to social distancing. In light of the public health crisis, more intimate quiet, individual reflections of prayer have replaced traditional large public memorials and candlelight vigils. In recognition of the invisible threat our peace officers face on a daily basis, we thank them for their steadfast determination to continue to protect us in the midst of trouble of the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic. Today we thank them for their continued watch.

Regrettably, so far this year, Texas leads the nation in line of duty deaths of law enforcement. Unfortunately, several of these deaths were related to COVID-19 and the number is rising. Unlike members of our community who can practice social distancing to protect us from this deadly disease, our peace officers do not share this luxury. In order to protect our families, they put their lives in harm's ways on a daily basis and face this deadly public health risk every minute that they are keeping our communities safe.

In recognition of the sacrifice that our peace officers must endure to protect our communities, on April 23 I wrote a letter to Texas Governor Greg Abbott to direct our state agencies to help our law enforcement officers and first responders who must confront COVID-19 as they help our communities. I was proud to join the Combined Law Enforcement Associations of Texas (CLEAT) to request that Texas officially acknowledge the public health risk that our law enforcement officers and first responders face during the COVID-19 pandemic. Requesting that any first responder-testing positive for COVID-19 be presumed to have contracted the disease while in the line of duty ensures that in the event of illness or death all benefits received are those from line of duty events. As author of similar legislation that presumes other illnesses are contracted in the line of duty, I implore Governor Abbott to direct our state agencies to recognize the added risk that our law enforcement and first responders must confront during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic we are living through has given everyone a newfound appreciation for the men and women in uniform who protect the peace, help our communities, and save the lives of our loved ones. As I continue to light a candle every day this week and offer a prayer to remember those who have fallen, or who have been disabled, in the line of duty, I pray that our state leaders will do everything they can to honor and pay tribute to our peace officers and first responders in these most challenging times. We owe you our safety, our peace of mind, and our lives. Thank you for your extraordinary public service during this unprecedented time in Texas' history.

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Senator Eddie Lucio, Jr. (D – Brownsville) represents Cameron, Hidalgo, Kenedy, Kleberg, and Willacy Counties. He is the Chairman of the Senate Committee on Intergovernmental Relations; Vice Chairman of the Senate Committee on Education; Member of the Senate Committees on State Affairs; Veteran Affairs & Border Security; and of the Select Committees on Redistricting; and, Texas Ports. He is member of the Sunset Advisory Commission and has been an ex-officio member of the DSHS Task Force of Border Public Health Officials since 2017. Elected in 1991, Lucio is third in seniority in the Texas Senate.