



WISCONSIN STATE REPRESENTATIVE

Brent Jacobson

87TH ASSEMBLY DISTRICT

Testimony in Support of Assembly Bill 285

Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

June 3rd 2025

Chairman Spiros and fellow committee members, thank you for holding a public hearing on Assembly Bill 285. This legislation establishes a program to provide active hearing protection devices to police and fire departments.

The individuals who serve our communities as law enforcement or firefighters face many hazards as they work to keep us safe. While it is easy to overlook, one of the more serious and pervasive of these hazards is noise exposure and hearing loss. According to a 2018 study, first responders and law enforcement officers report hearing loss at a rate of 71%. In contrast, approximately 15% of the general public experiences a loss of hearing. Not only is this a threat to the quality of life of those who serve on the front lines of public safety, but it also can lead to financial burdens for municipalities and the state from workers compensation claims.

One solution is to increase access to hearing protection devices. However, with law enforcement and first responders needing to maintain situational awareness and remain alert while on the job, most of these public servants would not wear traditional ear plugs or other passive hearing protection. However, advancing technology has allowed for active hearing protection devices, which dampen harmfully loud noises without blocking other noises. Increasing access to these devices for first responders and law enforcement would help them protect their hearing, without reducing their alertness or ability to react to developing situations.

While active hearing protection is more effective for these critical workers, it is also more expensive. With counties, municipalities, and law enforcement agencies already facing tight budgets, many will need assistance to provide these devices to their staff. The program created by this bill would provide this financial assistance, investing in the long-term health and quality of life of some of our most critical community members.

Thank you for your consideration of this proposal. I hope you will join me in addressing one of the most pressing occupational hazards faced by the men and women who keep us safe. At this time, I can answer any questions you may have.



June 3rd, 2025

Representative Spiros, Chair

Representative Piowarczyk, Vice-Chair

Members of the Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice and Public Safety

Testimony on 2025 Assembly Bill 285

Relating to: public protective services hearing protection assistance. (FE)

Thank you, Chairman Spiros, and other members of the committee for listening to my testimony today. This legislation protects our police officers in one of the most common, but often overlooked ways, they are hurt on the job: hearing damage.

Our law enforcement officers and firefighters operate in some of the most challenging and high-risk environments. Whether it's exposure to gunfire, sirens, heavy equipment, or even explosive devices, these professionals are regularly subjected to hazardous noise levels that pose serious risks to their long-term, or sometimes permanent hearing health. Unfortunately, in many departments, especially smaller or rural ones, protective hearing equipment is either outdated or unavailable.

Limiting the risk of hearing loss and auditory damage is a critical way the legislature can assist the law enforcement community. According to a 2018 study, 71% of officers reported hearing loss, compared to just 15% of American adults. Not only is this a significant cost to worker's compensation claims, these are challenges that impede law enforcement officer's ability to work effectively, and stay with them for the rest of their lives.

Solving this problem for law enforcement officers is more complicated than you might think. Unlike some other professions, police officers cannot wear general hearing protection because they cannot afford to miss minor sounds from their environment. Thankfully, modern technological advances offer a solution – active hearing protection. These advanced devices give us the best of both worlds; allowing wearers to hear conversations and small noises, and activating when decibel levels reach unsafe rates.

Assembly Bill 285 requires the Department of Transportation to create a program that will get these high-tech, valuable devices to our law enforcement and fire protection services. I believe this upgrade in equipment will pay dividends long into the future for the efficiency and health of the people who give so much to protect our communities. This program doesn't mandate the use of specific equipment but instead provides support and access to agencies that need it—an especially important feature for departments with limited budgets.

It is a smart, preventative investment in the health, safety, and long-term well-being of our protective services personnel. Thank you all again for your consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jesse James".

Senator Jesse James

23rd Senate District

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Wisconsin Troopers' Association

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To: Representative Spiros, Chair, and Members
Assembly Committee on Criminal Justice,

Fr: Glen Jones, Wisconsin Troopers Association

Da: June 3, 2025

Re: Support for AB 285, relating to law enforcement hearing protection

Thank you, Chair Spiros, and committee members for the opportunity to testify today regarding an important topic for law enforcement. My name is Glen Jones and I am representing the Wisconsin Troopers' Association.

Patrol officers typically experience hearing loss over the course of a career. This loss may be lessened by providing hearing protection that responds to loud noises, while still allowing soft noises to be heard. In general, law enforcement officers are required to monitor radios and other devices that create noise, while being expected to possess and maintain excellent hearing.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), 22 million Americans are exposed to hazardous noise levels at work. Included in those most at risk for occupational hearing loss are law enforcement officers. Also, according to CDC (2023), the average cost of a worker's compensation claim involving hearing loss was double that of other WC claims.

This costs employers and, in this case, taxpayers, money. Employers have a responsibility to provide safe working environments, and that includes noise levels. There are multiple strategies for limiting employee exposure to harmful noise and preventing job-related hearing loss, including:

- Substituting quieter equipment and tools
- Distancing workers from loud noise
- Reducing the duration, frequency or level of noise exposure (through work breaks, scheduling, etc.)
- **Providing protective devices (like earplugs and earmuffs)**

Many officers resist the idea of hearing protection as traditional hearing protection devices also hamper their ability to be aware of their surroundings. However, the concept of active hearing protection, as proposed in AB 285, would be a great proactive pilot to address that

concern while still being preventative. Ensuring that officers - especially those subject to certain environments of highway patrol, events with loud noise, sirens, and other significant noise exposure - can have access to a device that can help prevent hearing loss on the front end and would be a good investment for the state.

As state patrol officers, we are subject to hearing exams annually. The Wisconsin State Patrol follows (OSHA) national guidelines for hearing standards of new recruits. Each recruit is tested prior to hiring and we do allow correction for hearing aids, similar to allowing glasses to correct vision.

While hearing exams and other important measures required by OSHA or implemented by employers are helpful, they do not PREVENT the hearing loss in the first place. AB 285 would be an investment on the front end to help preserve workplace safety and overall quality of life by addressing what we know – law enforcement is a group most at risk for occupational hearing loss.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comment. I would be happy to answer any questions you have at this time.