

A Traumatic, Life-Changing Event for a Massachusetts Police Officer

By Mario Oliveira, NESPIN Field Representative

For more than 40 years, RISS has served thousands of local, state, federal, and tribal criminal justice agencies and other partners by providing adaptive solutions and services that facilitate information sharing, support criminal investigations, and promote officer safety. The primary goal of RISS continues to be sharing sensitive information across a variety of law enforcement disciplines, to not only further complex criminal investigations but to promote and enhance officer safety and awareness. I serve as the Eastern Massachusetts, Metropolitan Boston, and Cape Cod field representative at the NESPIN RISS Center so that I can devote the remainder of my life to enhancing our shared goal of promoting officer safety.



In addition, I also serve as a cofounder of the Violently Injured Police Officers (V.I.P.O.) Organization and Executive Director of the New England Chapter of Concerns of Police Survivors (C.O.P.S.). I am committed to the unifying mission of furthering officer safety and awareness that can be found in each of these organizations. I have been more deeply engaged in this work since experiencing a traumatic, life-changing event myself.

In November 2010, while serving an arrest warrant with agents of the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, I was shot six times in the chest and stomach at point-blank range by an individual who was trafficking illegal firearms from New Hampshire to the metropolitan Boston area then selling them to gang members for profit. I nearly died that night. I was given a second chance in life, and I have made the commitment to ensure that law enforcement officers who are violently and permanently injured in the commission of their duties do not have to suffer, worry, and fight for themselves as I once did.

In my leadership roles at V.I.P.O. and C.O.P.S., I have provided immediate and ongoing peer support to survivors whose loved ones were tragically killed in the line of duty. I am extremely active in providing education to police departments across Massachusetts on how to be adequately prepared to manage a traumatic line-of-duty death (LODD) incident within their own departments. As one can imagine, these situations can render those involved in a state of shock, experiencing incredible stress and overwhelming sadness. Without appropriate guidelines in place, these (normal) emotional responses can adversely impact and, at times, even prevent an appropriate response to the tragic incident.

In addition to supporting departments and family members who have lost someone in a LODD, I also provide peer support to law enforcement officers who are deemed to be permanently injured, resulting from a violent encounter in the line of duty. Alongside peer support, I provide education and resources to police departments on the specific and ongoing needs of these permanently disabled officers. Since surviving my near-death shooting, I have noticed that there are many police departments across New England that currently do not have a LODD/serious bodily injury policy in place, nor are they adequately informed as to what specific benefits (both state and federal) are afforded to the surviving families of these fallen heroes.

I have been on a personal crusade for the last five years—speaking at many police conferences, chiefs of police meetings, and police academies to bring the much-needed awareness to this incredibly important topic and to help law enforcement agencies more adequately prepare for a LODD or a serious bodily injury incident.

Serving as a NESPIN field representative affords me the opportunity to help with the preventative side of officer safety and awareness. For example, the “V.I.P.O. Shooting” presentation, which I copresent with the V.I.P.O. cofounder (retired Woburn, Massachusetts, police officer Bob DeNapoli, also disabled by a line-of-duty shooting), provides information on the **RISS Officer Safety Event Deconfliction System (RISSafe)**. RISSafe is used to deconflict high-risk and sensitive operations and effectively enhance the ability to keep police officers safe and secure in performing their respective law enforcement duties. Certain investigative efforts, such as the use of undercover operatives, can often create the potential for an unplanned “conflict” between various law enforcement agencies or officers/agents, who are unknowingly targeting the same individual(s) in a criminal investigation. The use of an officer safety event deconfliction system provides for a controlled and secure monitoring environment of these complex and dangerous covert operations, providing immediate notification to involved law enforcement agencies of identified conflicts.

NESPIN devotes a page on its website to house a model LODD police department policy (Chelsea, Massachusetts, Police Department) and to provide access to additional LODD/serious bodily injury-related documents. In addition, a model deconfliction policy and numerous educational materials are available at www.ncirc.gov/deconfliction.

There are other officer safety resources that may be of interest, including the **RISS Officer Safety Website**, which provides a variety of training videos, discussion forums, and bulletins of wanted persons. The site enables law enforcement officers to securely share information and better prepares them for when an apprehension is made.

The **VALOR Program** (VALOR) is designed to protect the safety, health, and well-being of our nation’s law enforcement officers and agencies. Since public safety and officer safety are intrinsically bound, VALOR also seeks to provide officers with tools to help increase trust and nurture legitimacy with the public. VALOR is continuously evolving to ensure that it addresses various current topics and integrates the latest research and practices to address all aspects of officer safety and wellness that have a direct impact on job safety and performance. These emerging issues can have a direct effect on an officer’s ability to prevent or survive the rigorous challenges and threats that he or she may face.

If you are an officer who needs assistance with accessing any of these resources or would like to schedule a training to address an officer safety issue, please contact me at moliveira@nespin.riss.net or your in-region RISS Center at www.riss.net. Please take a moment to review the information on the New England C.O.P.S. website at www.newenglandcops.org and the V.I.P.O. website at www.vipo911.org. These sites provide the necessary guidance and direction for agencies that are experiencing the sudden and tragic loss of an officer killed in the line of duty or an active duty officer who dies suddenly while off duty. Ideally, law enforcement agencies will adopt these recommended policies before the unthinkable happens. It happened to me, and it could happen to any one of you. We owe it to the men and women of the uniform to be prepared.