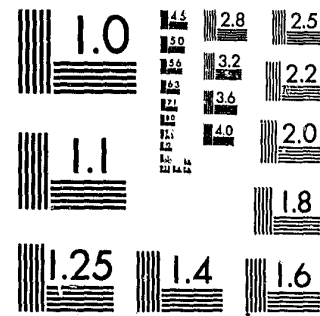


National Criminal Justice Reference Service



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National Institute of Justice  
United States Department of Justice  
Washington, D. C. 20531

12/9/82

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# Department of Justice

NCJRS

MAY 24 1982

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I appreciate this opportunity to appear today to describe the threat posed to law enforcement and other officials -- including the President -- by the availability of handgun ammunition capable of penetrating soft body armor. As this Subcommittee is probably aware, the Department of Justice developed the body armor used today by an estimated 50% of the nation's law enforcement officials and it is largely through the efforts of the Department and the International Association of Chiefs of Police that soft body armor is so widely used. This Subcommittee has previously received testimony to the effect that the use of soft body armor has saved the lives of an estimated 400 police officers during the past seven years. We are, therefore, deeply concerned over the availability of ammunition capable of defeating soft body armor and have devoted substantial efforts in recent months to developing an appropriate and workable legislative remedy to the problem.

Before proceeding to our specific legislative recommendation, let me take a few moments to put the issue in perspective. Toward this end, I would like to discuss briefly the development of modern body armor and our reaction to the recent threat to persons who rely upon body armor for protection.

Personal body armor available during the earlier part of the century was inappropriate for normal police work. Early garments were so heavy and awkward that police officers avoided wearing them. In addition to their bulk and weight, such garments inhibited movements necessary for self-defense. Heat buildup was another problem adding to wearer discomfort.

STATEMENT

OF

RUDOLPH GIULIANI  
ASSOCIATE ATTORNEY GENERAL

BEFORE

THE

SUBCOMMITTEE ON CRIME  
COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

CONCERNING

ARMOR-PIERCING BULLETS

ON

MAY 12, 1982

NCJRS  
MAY 20 1982  
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In 1971, a Justice Department employee working with the Department's technology development program became aware of a new synthetic fiber, marketed under the trademark name "Kevlar." This new fiber was originally developed for use as a replacement for steel cords in automobile tires. Recognizing the potential of this fiber, the Department of Justice pioneered the development of a prototype vest made from Kevlar and, following extensive laboratory work, tested this vest in fifteen cities. Results exceeded expectations. In addition to offering exceptional ballistics resistance, the new vests were light, flexible and could be worn unobtrusively under normal street clothes and uniforms.

By 1975, dozens of manufacturers had entered the body armor market producing a wide range of soft, lightweight body armor. Because few state or local agencies had the resources to test such body armor, the Department of Justice, as part of its Law Enforcement Technology Assessment Program, developed a body armor standard published in December of 1978. This standard establishes procedures for testing body armor and creates five different armor categories: Type I, Type IIA, Type II, Type III and Type IV. These body armor categories protect against increasing threat levels. For example, the Type I armor is the lightest weight providing protection against designated handgun ammunition when fired from a distance of five meters under specified conditions; the Type IV armor is the heaviest providing protection against designated armor-piercing rifle ammunition. Types I, IIA and II armor are varieties of soft body armor; Types III and IV incorporate metallic or ceramic materials and are

normally used by special weapons teams in sniper or seige situations. We have brought with us today examples of different types of armor and will discuss these varieties of armor in detail at the conclusion of my statement if the Subcommittee so desires.

Extensive testing was performed by the Department of Justice during the course of developing this armor standard. Moreover, other entities, particularly the Department of the Army, have carried out numerous tests to determine the penetration potential of various classes of firearms and ammunition as well as the capabilities of various categories of bullet-resistant body armor. The Department of Justice has also tested a wide range of handgun ammunition in connection with efforts to assist law enforcement agencies in selecting the most effective possible ammunition for police use.

In short, our technicians have known from the beginning that soft body armor, like all other forms of armor, can be pierced by particular types of rounds. As noted above, the standards used for testing different classes of body armor require that the armor be able to withstand specific types of bullets posing particular threat levels in order to receive a rating. It is for this reason that body armor is referred to by technicians as "bullet-resistant" or "ballistics-resistant" apparel. The fact that body armor is more commonly referred to by the public as "bullet-proof" has created the mistaken impression that body armor can or should be able to stop any bullet. Rather, soft body armor is designed to stop the most common threats that police officers face.

With this background, experts were not at all surprised by a network News program earlier this year on the KTW bullet and its ability to penetrate multiple thicknesses of soft body armor. Our technicians were, however, deeply disturbed that such information was so widely distributed to the public, in essence creating a shopping list for professional criminals.

The concern of the experts over the publicity surrounding the KTW bullet is two-fold. First, we fear that publicity surrounding the availability of ammunition capable of defeating body armor will encourage assassins and other criminals to search out these particularly dangerous classes of ammunition to use in their endeavors. Although our technicians have known about the KTW bullet for many years, this and other forms of armor-piercing ammunition were not felt to constitute a substantial threat because most criminals are not so sophisticated as to realize that the protection afforded by body armor is limited and that there are varieties of ammunition commonly available which will penetrate body armor. In the past, the conclusion that armor-piercing rounds posed only a minimum threat was difficult to fault as we are unaware of any instance in which an armor-clad police officer has been shot with armor-piercing handgun ammunition. Now, however, the publicity surrounding the KTW bullet has, in our view, increased the likelihood of such attacks.

Our second concern over the publicity is that it will, we believe, encourage a fatalistic attitude among police officers resulting in reduced use of body armor. In this regard, although the new soft body armor is comfortable to wear by comparison with

earlier types of armor, it is a constant problem for police administrators to insure that body armor issued to officers is indeed worn. Too often, officers to whom body armor was issued have been killed or severely wounded because the armor was left in a dressing room locker or the trunk of a squad car. Continuing publicity about the availability of armor-piercing handgun ammunition, together with the complete absence of any effective statutory safeguards, will, we fear, cause some police officers to decide that it is useless to wear their armor when ammunition is available on the streets that will defeat the armor. This potential indirect effect of armor-piercing handgun ammunition could result in more deaths and crippling injuries than the actual use of armor-piercing bullets against officers wearing body armor. In short, we believe it is important to let the law enforcement officers of the nation know that measures are being taken to prevent the criminal use of armor-piercing ammunition. Legislation in this area would, we believe, have the effect of encouraging law enforcement officers to wear body armor issued to them.

Again, because we feel that publicity surrounding armor-piercing ammunition has the effect of increasing the risk to those who use body armor, I will carefully avoid any discussion of specific handgun rounds capable of penetrating armor. I appreciate the cooperation of the Subcommittee in agreeing not to disclose the identity of particular armor-piercing ammunition. Suffice it to say that there are a number of handgun bullets capable of penetrating body armor in addition to the KTW which has received so much publicity

and we believe it is contrary to the public interest to publicize such dangerous ammunition.

Penetration capacity is, of course, a matter of basic physics. There are two major factors which determine penetration capability. First is the surface area over which the force is distributed; a bullet which expands upon impact spreads its force over a larger area than one which retains its shape. Therefore, a projectile composed of a hard substance normally has greater penetration potential than a soft projectile which mushrooms upon impact. The second major factor in penetration is velocity; the higher the velocity of a bullet, the greater its penetration capability. Thus high-power rifles, because of the incredible velocities they produce, have greater penetration power than handguns. Soft body armor is designed primarily to protect against handgun bullets. This reflects the fact that handguns are the weapons of choice of criminals representing -- according to one survey -- 83% of firearms seized by police. Moreover, handguns represent a greater threat to law enforcement officials than long guns because they are easily concealable. We have, therefore, focused our attention on armor-piercing handgun ammunition.

One of the first actions taken by the Department of Justice in response to the publicity surrounding the KTW bullet was to arrange for a demonstration to verify that the information furnished by our technicians was indeed correct. In February, a variety of handgun bullets were tested against a Type II vest at the FBI firing range in Quantico, Virginia. That demonstration corroborated the

information furnished by technicians -- a number of the bullets tested, in addition to the KTW, defeated the body armor. The armor used in that demonstration has been submitted to the Subcommittee for inspection and we will, of course, be pleased to furnish additional information regarding the February demonstration so long as we can do so without publicly disclosing the varieties of bullets which defeated the armor.

Based upon this and other information, we commenced development of a legislative response to the problem of armor-piercing bullets. Because an early discussion draft of a proposed armor-piercing bullet bill was somehow disclosed to the media and published in a firearms publication, it is no secret that our initial proposals in this area were very similar to H.R. 5437 introduced by Representative Biaggi. As the Treasury Department indicated in its testimony before this Subcommittee earlier this year, however, our continuing study of this issue revealed that there are serious flaws in the broad ban on armor-piercing handgun ammunition proposed in early Department legislative proposals and in H.R. 5437.

First, to date we have been unable to describe armor-piercing handgun ammunition in a way which reaches all rounds capable of defeating soft body armor without including a number of popular handgun bullets which have long been widely used for legitimate sporting and recreational purposes. The simple fact is that some bullets with a legitimate use will defeat soft body armor. Moreover, in certain handgun calibers, the effect of a ban on armor-piercing bullets would effectively deprive firearms owners of the use of

their weapons by rendering illegal all presently available commercially manufactured ammunition.

Given the fact that we are aware of no instance in which an armor-clad law enforcement official has been attacked with armor-piercing handgun ammunition, we cannot justify legislation banning all ammunition capable of penetrating the type of soft body armor worn by law enforcement officials. Put simply, we cannot recommend legislation so seriously disrupting the firearms and ammunition industry and so clearly impinging upon the interests of legitimate gun owners where the basis is solely a potential rather than a demonstrated threat. Furthermore, I should note that the Department of the Treasury has negotiated agreements with several ammunition manufacturers which will reduce the potential that handgun bullets designed for penetration will be available to anyone other than law enforcement and military agencies. Treasury reports that ammunition manufacturers are sensitive to the problem and have responded in a responsible manner to our requests for limitations on armor-piercing bullets.

A second serious problem with H.R. 5437 is that it would produce unjust results. This difficulty arises from the fact that ammunition performs differently depending upon the type of firearm from which it is fired. A particular round fired from a revolver with a four-inch barrel, for example, might not penetrate body armor whereas the same ammunition, if fired from a revolver with a six-inch barrel might defeat the same armor. This is because increased barrel length affects projectile velocity thus enhancing penetration power. We believe, therefore, that it would be impossible to justify,

for example, imposition of a minimum mandatory prison sentence under H.R. 5437 when it could be demonstrated that the ammunition, although classified as "armor-piercing" under the definition in the bill, would in fact not penetrate soft body armor when fired from the handgun possessed by the defendant at the time of the underlying criminal offense.

In addition to these difficulties, there are others which have been discussed by the Department of Treasury which I will not dwell on today including the cost of testing all commercially available ammunition, the problem posed by ammunition which can be fired interchangeably from either handguns or long guns and so forth. Suffice it to say that we do not believe the ban proposals presently before the Subcommittee are appropriate.

Nevertheless, we see no legitimate reason for private use or possession of handgun bullets, such as the KTW, that are designed specifically for the purpose of armor penetration. Therefore, we will continue to work with the Department of the Treasury and with the Subcommittee to develop a workable definition of such bullets. Our clear objective is to prevent criminals from having access to handgun bullets designed specifically to penetrate armor. In the meantime, however, we believe that immediate action in this area is needed and have submitted to the Subcommittee a draft bill designed to fill the existing gap in federal law. We believe this stopgap proposal would provide a meaningful disincentive to use of armor-piercing bullets during the course of federal crimes. Our proposal would establish a minimum, mandatory prison sentence of five years for the use of armor-piercing handgun ammunition during

the course of a federal crime of violence. By contrast with other similar proposals, our bill would provide for imposition of this minimum mandatory sentence only where it can be proved that the ammunition would penetrate Type IIA body armor -- the most popular armor for law enforcement use -- when fired from the firearm in the possession of the defendant. This approach avoids the anomaly described above where a person could be subjected to enhanced sentencing even though a bullet classified as "armor-piercing" would not, in fact, penetrate body armor if fired from his weapon.

Our proposal covers only federal crimes committed with armor-piercing handgun ammunition as we believe that the state interest in prosecuting perpetrators of state offenses outweighs the federal interest. If our bill is enacted by the Congress, we will notify the 50 states and urge enactment of similar state laws to protect state and local law enforcement officials.

We believe that this legislation would provide a significant deterrent to the use of armor-piercing handgun ammunition and that, where such ammunition is used during the course of a federal crime, would insure that the offender is imprisoned for a lengthy period thereby incapacitating that individual from the further commission of such offenses. In this regard, our proposal makes clear that the minimum mandatory sentence is to be served consecutively with the sentence imposed for the underlying crime of violence, that the sentence is not subject to probation or suspension, and that a person so sentenced is not eligible for parole.

Finally, we recommend against the enactment of the various proposals before the Subcommittee to authorize detailed testing of

handgun ammunition and body armor. Although we do not have solid test data on every one of the hundreds of different types of handgun ammunition manufactured here and abroad in recent years, we do have extensive information on bullet characteristics and armor capabilities and do not feel that further elaborate testing such as that proposed in H.R. 2280 is necessary. Rather, we believe we have sufficient information upon which to base legislation along the lines of our proposal.

Mr. Chairman, we believe that handgun ammunition designed to penetrate armor must be kept out of the hands of criminals and we look forward to working with your Subcommittee toward that end. We also believe that the legislation we have proposed today -- although modest by comparison with some other bills -- would fill a gap in existing law by recognizing that certain types of handgun ammunition are particularly dangerous and that the commission of a crime involving such ammunition should result in harsher penalties than would otherwise be applicable. In essence, our proposal recognizes varying ammunition threat levels in determining sentencing just as do existing laws which provide for enhanced sentencing for use of a firearm during the course of a felony. This legislation would provide new and needed protection for law enforcement officials and others who use soft body armor. We will appreciate your attention to this proposal. Of course, we will be pleased to work closely with you and your staff in refining this proposal should you feel that further adjustments are needed.

**END**