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Officers' courage shouldn't be taken for granted

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It's the kind of news that should be alarming, yet it's all too common.

A local TV news station on Saturday (Feb. 15) reported that a man attempted to assault a Richland County deputy after being pulled over for driving more than 100 miles per hour. The suspect was subdued and arrested.

In this case, the assailant didn't appear to have a weapon. Still, it was a stark reminder of the dangers our police officers face.

Other incidents this year in South Carolina have been more serious:

- In early January, a Charlotte police officer was serving a warrant in Fort Mill, SC, when he was shot by an armed robbery suspect. According to media reports, the officer was struck in the shoulder and pelvis.

- A couple of days later, in the small town of Piedmont, SC, an Anderson County sheriff's deputy was involved in a shooting after a man tried to run him over in his vehicle. According to the Anderson Independent-Mail, the officer shot and wounded the man, who was then charged with attempted murder.

- In early February, a Richland County sheriff's deputy had responded to a call about an argument at a Columbia home when a suspect fired shots through the door of the home in the officer's direction.

The good news is that each of these officers survived. Sadly, that's not always the case.

The men and women of law enforcement put their lives on the line daily to keep us safe. They work in an environment where even a routine call can turn tragic.

Many devote their lives to protecting people they don't even know — including those who would do them harm. They work long hours, sometimes for very little pay.

And of course, they often receive very little appreciation. We all know the feeling: We see blue lights, we pull over, and we think more about the inconvenience of being stopped for a burned out brake light than we do about the noble public service performed by the officer.

That's a natural reaction. Still, it's a shame. While it may seem like a routine traffic stop to us, our officers never really know what awaits them. Their courage shouldn't be taken for granted.

Every year in South Carolina, lawmen, firefighters and other first-responders are killed in the line of duty. While there's no way to adequately thank those who've made the ultimate sacrifice for our safety, or to adequately console their loved ones, there are several memorials across the state that pay tribute to our fallen officers.

But perhaps the best way to honor the legacy of our heroic fallen officers would be to say "thank you" to those who still place themselves in harm's way to protect us. Let's let them know we appreciate all they do whenever we come into contact with them — even when we get pulled over by those enforcing our traffic laws.

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