

City detectives will get lighter protective vest

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NYPD detectives, many of whom are known for their fashionable business suits, will soon be fashionably protected.

More than 1,000 lightweight bullet-resistant vests designed to be easier to wear will be distributed to detectives before the end of the year, fulfilling a promise the department made three years ago, NYPD First Deputy Commissioner Edward Caban said Wednesday.

"The goal was to design a new ballistic vest that was easier and quicker for detectives to wear with their business attire," Caban said at a news conference Wednesday at Police Headquarters.

"They are thinner and lighter while still providing lifesaving protection," Caban said of the new vests. "But most importantly, our detectives like them and they are wearing them out in the field consistently."

The push for lighter vests for detectives to wear with their suits was "born out of tragedy" following the death of Queens Detective Brian Simonsen in 2019, Caban said.

Simonsen wasn't wearing a bullet-resistant vest when he was killed by friendly fire responding to a gunpoint robbery at a T-Mobile store in Richmond Hill.

By the end of 2019, 550 of the thinner vests were distributed to various detective squads around the city as part of a pilot program to see if detectives would wear them. The new vests can be worn under suit jackets.

Leanne Simonsen, the fallen detective's widow, personally hand-delivered the vests to the 102nd Precinct, where her husband worked when they were first rolled out.

"You see our detectives wearing these vests out at crime scenes doing interviews," NYPD Chief of Detectives James Essig said Wednesday. Essig said the department is "getting very positive feedback" about the vests.

The lighter vests were repeatedly tested against different types of gunfire, as well as rapid gunfire, and proved to offer the same amount of protection as the traditional vests, which can weigh between 3 and 5 pounds.

Once the pilot program was deemed a success, the NYPD decided to outfit all of the department's 4,600 detectives with the thinner vests.

The final 1,000 vests were purchased for \$750,000 through the help of the New York City Police Foundation, a nonprofit that first bought bullet-resistant vests for the NYPD in 1972, and the Detectives' Endowment Association, the union for NYPD detectives.

The new vests "offer protection traditional vests provide," said Detectives' Endowment Association President Paul DiGiacomo. "They will help protect our members while they are saving the citizens of New York City."