



Essex Police Department

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Paul D. Francis/
Chief of Police



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Dear Chair Aaron Michlewitz and Chair Claire Cronin,

Please accept the following testimony with regard to SB2820 - *An Act to reform police standards and shift resources to build a more equitable, fair and just commonwealth that values Black lives and communities of color.*

As the Chief of Police of a small police department, I am very concerned about the collateral damage that this bill, as written and passed by the Senate, will have on my department and policing in general here in the Commonwealth. I sincerely believe we can always do better, and will always support commonsense, well thought out change for the better, but such change must involve all of the stakeholders. Unfortunately this was not the case with SB2820, and I would be remiss if I didn't say that I find what took place in the Senate disheartening at best, and I believe the negative effects of this rush to pass legislation, without proper vetting and input, will be felt for years to come.

In Massachusetts we have been ahead of the curve for years when it comes to issues of racial bias and diversity, as well as the use of excessive force. Though we always welcome more training, and strive to be the best police officers we can be, there is a cost associated with training. It seems counterproductive to be considering taking funds away from policing, when more training will be mandated. In as much as I realize that time is of the essence in this situation, I will not attempt to dissect the bill as written, and I feel as though MCOPA has covered it well. However, I feel as though it's imperative that I speak about Qualified Immunity.

For me Qualified Immunity is about more than just protecting police officers from frivolous lawsuits. With Qualified Immunity as it stands, police officers can be confident that they can do their jobs without the constant fear of being sued, possibly losing all that they have worked for, including their jobs, with all of this exacerbated by the impact on their families. Qualified Immunity is there to protect police officers of integrity, that perform tasks on a daily basis that most would not have the fortitude to do, and they do so in good faith, knowing that there's always a chance of being sued, but that there are protections in place when acting reasonably and in good faith.

My fear, not only for my department, but for the policing profession in general is that we will have a mass exodus of experienced, professional police officers that act with integrity, respect and empathy. Recruitment of police officers has been on the decline for some time now, with the defunding of the Quinn Bill, Social Media and news outlets accentuating the negative in policing by the minute. I have had many officers of all ranks, both on my department and from other departments, who have been contemplating leaving the field. When you then take into account concerns for catching COVID-19, and infecting family members, along with being advised that members of various groups are going to target police officers and family members at their homes due to current events, I'm afraid changing and/or dismantling Qualified Immunity might be the final straw for many officers. You need to know that for many, we feel as though we have been unjustly vilified, and don't know where to turn. I ask you to please consider those of us in this field, we are mothers and fathers, sons and daughters, children and grandchildren, just like all of you, we are not what we are being portrayed to be. Please don't rush to judgement and "throw the baby out with the bathwater".

Respectfully,

Paul D. Francis/
Chief of Police