



# Middleton Police Department

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*James A. DiGianvittorio*  
*Chief of Police*

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”.

I have been a police officer for the past 35 years and Chief of Police for 13 years. I have held the positions of President of the Essex County Chiefs of Police Association and held the position of President of the Massachusetts Chiefs of Police Association in 2017.

During my time as President of the MA. Chiefs Association I dedicated my time to help create a bill for police training, and that Bill came to fruition in 2018 by way of a dedicated funding source through a surcharge in car rental fees.

I have always believed that Massachusetts has been well above the curve in training our police officers and I feel that we have now being painted with the same wide brush as other law enforcement officers from around the country, I also believe that the training we provide to our officers is the best in the country and we have always and will always support more training and education for our officers.

The Senate Bill version as presently drafted and if adopted will basically undermine all our efforts to provide fair and equitable policing in the Commonwealth.

The men and women who commit themselves to this profession of law enforcement take pride in their role. Every day they are asked to put their lives on the line to ensure the safety of others, and for that they do deserve respect and appreciation.

This should be their day to shine. I tell my officers “Do not tarnish what you have accomplished by losing sight of who you are when you don your uniform. What you have chosen to do is a mission, a calling, no less, as guardians of the public safety. Do not take the tasks inherent in this noble and distinguished undertaking lightly”.

Every day of their life in uniform, they will be referred to as law enforcement officers, although only a small portion of what they will be doing on the job is enforce the law.

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We need promote mutual respect with the general public, build bridges in our communities. One way we can do this is through supporting community-based problem solving along with a willingness to take principled stands in the face of bias, injustice, racism, hatred, and acts of violence.

We must continually remind ourselves to be vigilant, courageous and bold during this time of uncertainty. “We are all in this together”. It’s time for the law enforcement culture to embrace a “Guardian-rather than a Warrior” mentality.

However, the State Senate Bill talks about Qualified Immunity “Qualified immunity balances two important interests – the need to hold public officials accountable when they exercise power irresponsibly and the need to shield officials from harassment, distraction, and liability when they perform their duties reasonably. The Senate Bill will tie officers’ hands and make them second guess their actions which could lead to death or serious bodily injury.

As a Police Chief, I believe that it is my duty to establish and encourage good community relations between my department and the people of my town. It is the duty of all law enforcement officers to build bridges among our communities, not walls.

The answer to our nation’s current problems will not come from assigning blame to all of law enforcement. It will not come from deepening the divide between our citizens and those that are working to protect them. We must remember the words of Dr. King, that “returning violence for violence, multiplies violence, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars.”

I have an unwavering faith that the law enforcement community can be instrumental in assisting our communities through this transitional period. The Senate and the House need to take a step back and not have such a “knee jerk reaction’ to the problems that they perceive as problems without first obtaining statistical data to the contrary.

The International Chief of Police Association Past President, and Retired Wellesley Police Chief, Terrence Cunningham spoke about the concept of historical injustice and how acknowledging it will allow us to move forward and bridge the current gap of mistrust between law enforcement and communities of color. For when we acknowledge how we got here and what brought us to this point, only then can we establish a deeper sense of trust. A trust that will foster enhanced relationships with mutual empathy and respect.

I also believe that we must be proactive and motivate our police departments to develop new ways of deploying services. Re committing to the concept of community policing for example. Our police departments must understand the benefits of involving our community in the process from the beginning. Promoting police-community partnerships and cooperative problem solving are ways that police can address crime and quality of life issues affecting the communities they serve.

I encourage officers of all ranks to engage in some form of community service or outreach, both on duty and off duty; I encourage police chiefs around the commonwealth to promote the practice of transparency and communication between our department and our residents.

The culture of a police department begins at the top.

The Chief establishes the tone for everything from the style of uniform to policies governing the use of force and procedures for dealing with victims and suspects. I believe in a three-step method of policing. The first step is addressing how the police force interacts with the public. The second is how the public perceives the police in our community. And the most important of all is how the chief interacts with the department.

Working in all directions is essential because one won't work without the other. None of these steps will be a "quick fix" However, improving interactions with the public and exemplifying standards of professionalism and integrity are all crucial to build an effective police force in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Well-known football coach Vince Lombardi once said, "The achievements of an organization are the results of the combined effort of each individual".

All of these actions serve to humanize police officers in the eyes of the public and establish positive and repeatable interactions, with our communities in this State.

Our culture employs the term hero far too loosely. We over use it for movie stars, politicians, and professional athletes. While such individuals might have a unique, singular ability and while they might on occasion engage in heroic efforts, they are not our true heroes. Our true heroes are the men and woman of law enforcement who demonstrate professionalism under the most trying circumstances, who in the face of danger run towards the threat not away from it. "Our Police Officers are our true heroes".

This is what makes the police officers in this state a cut above the rest.

Thank you,

Chief James DiGianvittorio