



The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
House of Representatives

Jack Patrick Lewis
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The Honorable Aaron Michlewitz, Chair
House Committee on Ways & Means
State House, Room 243
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Claire D. Cronin, House Chair
Joint Committee on the Judiciary
State House, Room 136
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Chairs Michlewitz and Cronin,

I am writing to you today in support of bills **S.2820, *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.***

Tragically, the recent murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, Tony McDade, Nina Pop, and Sean Reed, among countless others, have once again brought into sharp relief the pervasive, deep-seeded, deadly, and systemic racism that exist in our Commonwealth and our country. And though I do not think the reforms offered in this bill will deliver us the solution to the centuries of police violence, discrimination, and disinvestment in most cases perpetrated consciously and intentionally against Black communities, I believe the provisions and accountability measures incorporated therein will prove an critical first step in reducing harm and saving lives.

In particular, I want to highlight my support for priority provisions of my colleagues of color, including:

- The establishment of the **Police Officer Standards and Accreditation Committee**, along with certification and decertification requirements and procedures. While we know that police violence is not simply an issue of “bad apples,” I believe this new system will help remove some of our most egregious offenders, as well as contribute to a culture shift as officers face more substantive repercussions for violations.
- The strengthening of **use of force rules**, including increased training and use requirements for **de-escalation tactics**, a **requirement to intercede** to prevent an unreasonable use of force, and the banning of **choke holds**.
- Increasing **transparency** through the establishment of public databases listing certification information for officers, as well as all complaints made against officers.
- The limitations on **qualified immunity**, which provide greater recourse to individuals whose rights have been violated by law enforcement professionals.
- The restrictions on procurement of **military-grade weapons and equipment** for our local police departments.

Additionally, there are a few provisions which have been mentioned, but which I believe should be strengthened, including:

- An outright **ban on the use of tear gas and chemical weapons** against individuals and groups in the Commonwealth, rather than restricted use. These devices have been banned from use during combat since 1925, which was reaffirmed in the UN Chemical Weapons Convention of 1997, and have no place in our communities.
- An outright **ban on so-called “no-knock warrants,”** rather than restricted use and increased requirements. A relic of the disastrous War on Drugs, use of this type of warrant has increased 30-fold since the 1980’s, and with Florida and Oregon having successfully outlawed the use of such warrants, their necessity is dubious, and the harms inflicted, often on innocent individuals, is clear.
- I believe the inclusion of the **Justice Reinvestment Workforce Development Fund**, which reinvest savings from criminal justice system reforms directly into evidence-based programming and communities most impacted by police violence and mass incarceration is one of the most important provisions of this bill. It is this type of work in divesting from programs and institutions that bring harm to our communities of color, and investing instead in programs and institutions that will build-up and support these same communities, that I believe will bring the greatest long-term benefit and make the greatest impact on the dismantling of racist institutions and systemic racism more broadly. However, the **\$10 million cap** included in this bill is wholly insufficient to meet the needs and redress the harms in these communities, especially when taken in comparison to the proposed FY’21 DOC budget of \$674 million. This ratio must be rapidly reversed, and eliminating the cap to this fund will provide a first step in that fight.

I am thankful to you both for your commitment to responding to this moment in our nation’s history, and to the demands for change brought by our constituents. I hope that this bill will be brought to the floor for a vote as quickly as possible. More importantly, however, I hope that the House will see this bill as a starting point, as a means of reducing harm in the near-term as we examine the root causes of these injustices and inequalities, and develop policies and institutions that will dismantle the structural racism endemic to life in the Commonwealth and in our country. I hope we will strive to find ways to center justice, particularly racial justice, in all of our work in the legislature, especially as we look forward toward urgently needed environmental, healthcare, and housing reforms. And, as LGBTQ+ people of color as well as other individuals with multiple and intersecting oppressed identities are among those most likely to fall victim to police violence and structural racism more broadly, I hope we will do so in a way that is intersectional.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on this critical bill, and I look forward to uplifting the work of my colleagues of color and collaborating with you on this and future legislation addressing structural racism in Massachusetts in the months and years to come. As always, do not hesitate to reach out with any additional questions or for additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jack Patrick Lewis". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jack Patrick Lewis
State Representative
7th Middlesex District