



WORCESTER FIREFIGHTERS LOCAL 1009

International Association of Fire Fighters

625 CHANDLER STREET • WORCESTER, MA 01602 • OFFICE: (508) 831-0519 • FAX: (508) 797-1690

International Association of Fire Fighters
Professional Fire Fighters of Massachusetts

July 17, 2020

Speaker DeLeo and the Honorable Representatives of the Massachusetts House,

On behalf of Worcester Fire Fighters Local 1009, I testify in opposition of SB2820 as sent to the House of Representatives. Local 1009 supports the ongoing efforts in our community and across the Commonwealth to reassess our social interactions, our beliefs, perceptions, and the way we treat each other. We support the demand that our public safety should be held to the highest of standards. We acknowledge that changes should and need to be made as we move forward together. However, the legislation before the House of Representatives, while largely positive and inclusive of measures that will exact true and meaningful change, is riddled with anti-labor, anti-worker, and grossly unfair treatment of public employees.

This legislation has been consumed by the influence of the Massachusetts Municipal Association (MMA), a political organization purporting an allegiance to the taxpayer but truly dedicated to eliminating worker's rights and abolishing unions. The MMA is using the social discussion occurring across our nation as an opportunity to push forward their longstanding agenda to suppress the protections and due process afforded to our public employees. They are using the demand for police reform to remove longstanding and trusted protections from not only our police but all public employees.

The Senate bill's elimination of Qualified Immunity as we know it, does nothing to reform policing and curb the instances of police brutality. Rather, the change merely makes it more likely cities and towns will spend more tax dollars to defend against lawsuits while also exposing all public employees to more litigation. This change is a direct affront to the public employees who day in and day out perform their jobs to the best of their abilities and in the best interests of the public they serve. This change puts those public employees and their families at risk by eliminating protections afforded to them when they perform their duties in good faith, with professionalism, and within the training they have been provided. Unlike the narrative that extols Qualified Immunity as a shield so that police can abuse their power, it needs to be emphatically clear that Qualified Immunity only protects public employees that use their authority in a manner consistent with law, ethics, and training. Furthermore, the bill's elimination of Qualified Immunity extends beyond our police force to all public employees equally, including our fire fighters.



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Due to influences like the MMA, this bill reaches even farther by eliminating due process and replacing it with an oversight board, half of whose members are individuals not subject to certification. Every other licensing or certification agency in the Commonwealth includes an overwhelming majority of individuals who possess first-hand knowledge about the respective occupations that they are tasked with assessing. This proposed board, which is charged with handing down judgements upon law enforcement officers, also replaces longstanding neutral entities available to all other public employees and unions to ensure discipline is consistent with just cause. This bill fails to protect civil service, arbitration, and the due process that our public servants deserve.

While the debate surrounding police reform is warranted in light of the events that have occurred across this nation, the assault on public employees is not. The opportunistic attacks by self-serving anti-union organizations on our public employees should be stopped and provisions that do not reform policing but only suppress the working people of our communities should be eliminated from this bill.

Sincerely,

Michael Papagni
President

Worcester Fire Fighters Local 1009