

**Written Testimony re: S2820, 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**

Dear Chairs Cronin & Michlewitz,

I am a resident of Boston and I am writing to urge you to include language addressing the four state-level priorities of the Massachusetts Elected Officials of Color:

1. Implement a statewide Peace Officers Standards and Training (POST) system that certifies police officers and enables de-certification for misconduct and abuse (inspired by H2146 - Reps. Holmes & Vieira);
2. Establish an Office of Diversity and Equal Opportunity to establish guidelines and review for diversity plans for all state agencies and establish a peace officer exam advisory board to review examinations for appointment and promotion of peace officers (H2292 - Rep. Holmes);
3. Establish a commission to study how the systemic presence of institutional racism has created a culture of structural racial inequality which has exacerbated disproportionate minority contact with the criminal justice system in Massachusetts (H1440 - Rep. Holmes); and
4. Adopt clear statutory limits on police use of force, including choke-holds and other tactics known to have deadly consequences, require independent investigation of officer-related deaths, and require data collection and reporting on race, regarding all arrests and police use of force by every department (HD5128 - Liz Miranda)

In addition, we must reform qualified immunity to ensure that people have recourse when their constitutional rights are violated. I fear that these reforms will mean nothing if there is no way for victims of police brutality to have their day in court to hold officers accountable for violating their constitutional rights. Under the current system, MA residents who have been beaten, sexually assault, or had their property and homes destroyed by law enforcement in violation of their civil rights must bear the cost of medical bills, counseling services, and even funeral services because they are barred from bringing a case against officers in most circumstance. There has been much misinformation that officers would be personally liable for damages, but the indemnification statute would allow for municipalities to pay for the damages should victims of police violence prevail in court. While I worry about the effects this may have on municipal budgets, I am more worried about victims of police violence having no resource to redress the wrongs that have been committed against them. It is my belief that allowing civil suits against officers who violate civil rights will not only provide some level of justice for the victims but also act as a deterrent to excessive use of force and violence.

Thank you for taking testimony on this important legislation. It is time to answer the call that Black Lives Matter, and pass legislation that creates systemic change to keep Massachusetts residents safe from police violence.

Sincerely,

Jaime Watson