



**TOWN OF ASHFIELD
POLICE DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE 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.

For background purposes, the Town of Ashfield is a rural hill town community, it is approximately 42.03 square miles, with a general population of 1,800. In the summer this rises due to the number of summer homes located in our Town. The Police Department is small with a very limited budget (\$24,190.00 expense, \$52,746 reserve wages). This Department exists with one full time officer (Chief), six part time officers and two auxiliary officers who do not patrol.

A little over three years ago, I was appointed as Police Chief to this lovely Town. Over these three years, the officers and I have worked tirelessly to make us a part of the community. I strongly agree with the principles of Robert Peel's Community Policing, one that stands out is the police are the public [community] and the public [community] is the police. As a young officer (in 1988), I was fortunate enough to have a Chief that practiced community togetherness with the police.

I brought this concept to the Town of Ashfield and have not looked back since. The officers participate in many community functions: Kids market, Fall Festival, Ice cream social (we made sundaes), holiday party for our elementary school children, delivering food from the Hill town Food Pantry, Elder TRIAD visits, even hand delivering masks to our elders, these are a few examples of our commitment to our Town and our residents.

I am deeply concerned as to the direction this bill may take. Part time officers are the back-bone of my Department, this is a fact. Our officers not only complete the mandated training by the MPTC they also participate in many, many hours of additional training on their own time. This enables them to be the best, most informed being highly trained officers. They are self-sufficient and must rely on themselves to mediate, calm and deescalate many situations. Officer back up is not readily available which, can be up to 45 minutes away, coupled with radio service that is scattered at best, and virtually no cell service. We know the risks and because we are dedicated to this Community, we met them head on every day.

Many officers may feel that they are unable to carry on and will turn in their badge due to the changes in Qualified Immunity. It seems to me that the honest, ethical and good police officers are being penalized. They have done their job, treating all with respect and dignity. I expect no less from them.

We cannot lose those that are good in this profession.

We are proactive in community policing. We want to be here. We want to support our Town. We want to keep our residents safe and secure.

I agree with a certification process. An officer deserves an appeal process with a decision of decertification. No one knows what happens to another, there are reasons and circumstances that arise that are out of our control, we are human.

Education and knowledge are essential to an officer. It is essential to all. We need to teach our history to all, starting in the schools. United States History shows us our past mistakes and our successes, from this we learn to not make these

same mistakes again. There has always been a certain type of non-selection when it comes to our history, as an example, during my time in high school (early 1980's) they did not teach about the Viet Nam Conflict, my father being a veteran of this war, felt undignified and forgotten for his service. No matter what we feel about history it is ours. We cannot forget our past and go forward.

As a Chief, I am in support of educating my officers, training is an important part of our job, learning new ideas and new information so we can do our jobs to the best of our ability.

We have one elementary school and there is no school resource officer. Our community outreach officer is active in the school in a limited capacity, teaching safety and DARE. This officer is integral in showing that we, as police officers, are here to support and help our community. In the past, I have witnessed a young child so scared of me he was shaking. I was in the school sitting in a tiny chair talking about Halloween safety. The teachers brought in my two children to show him I was a mom and a person as well. This child came over to me and put his hand on my knee and you could see a weight had been lifted from him and he smiled. There was a reason he was fearful; I can only guess there had been interactions with law enforcement in his family setting that were scary for him. This one interaction showed him that I at least was not just a uniform.

Small town policing is more than upholding the laws of the Commonwealth, it is supporting our community and working with them, not against them. Treating all with dignity and respect, while doing our job.

Many times, prior to COVID-19, I have had residents into the station, they sit down next to me and we talk. This could be about a criminal issue or a personal issue. After listening, we try to come up with a plan and how to execute that plan. This is community.

I would request that all think long and hard about this bill and the ramifications that it brings to those hard working, ethical and dedicated police officers. Massachusetts has always been ahead of the game when it has come to mandated training and law enforcement requirements, and our policing reflects that.

I also extend to all, an opportunity to come to Ashfield, meet the Department, see how we interact, see how we deal with situations, and watch us serve and protect our community.

Thank you for this opportunity to express my concerns and some of my experiences.

Chief Beth Ann R. Bezio

Ashfield Police Department