

July 16, 2020

House Ways and Means and Judiciary Committee,

My name is Timothy O'Toole and I have been a police officer for over 20 years. I am currently employed by the Framingham Police Department with a current rank of a Sergeant and assigned to the Detective Bureau.

I would like to share a few short stories involving my personal experience with police officers and also being employed as a police officer.

When my brother was approximately 5 years old he suffered from epiglottitis, a condition that blocked his airway and prevented him from breathing. Two police officers responded to my mother's desperate call for help to save his life. Due to the quick actions of the police officer's and an emergency tracheotomy my brother is still with us 46 years later.

In 2006, I transferred from the Shrewsbury Police Department to the Framingham Police Department. It was a tough decision, but I was in search of a larger organization with more opportunity. I will never forget my Step-father asking me to stay in Shrewsbury for it was a safer community with less chance of getting hurt or even killed. I am a very modest person but feel it necessary to share a few examples of my experience and for you to understand how dangerous this job is and what a police officer may encounter in any type of community large or small. It is extremely important to support our police officers and not succumb to the false rhetoric that is being spread throughout the country.

During my 20 plus years as a police officer I have encountered approximately 14 individuals armed with firearms. These individuals were involved in either drug dealing, gang activity, armed robberies and murders. But, none of the encounters stand out in my memory as the one below.

On April 14, 2009, coincidentally my brother's birthday, started as every other day. I told my wife and kids I loved them and gave them all a kiss before leaving for my evening shift in uniformed patrol. On the way to work I called my brother and wished him a Happy Birthday (thankful for those two police officers that saved his life many years ago). I arrived at work and went about my daily routine. I put my bullet proof vest on followed by my uniform and duty belt. Roll call was held promptly at 3:50 p.m. Roll call was attended by the 7 Police Officers that would have to rely on one another for the next 8 hours while serving and protecting the 70,000 citizens in the City of Framingham. 1 Police Officer for every 10,000 citizens. If Bill S2800 passes it is a guarantee the ratio will be much worse.

The evening shift was winding down and at approximately 10:30 p.m. I met with my partner for a few minutes before the next call. At approximately 10:40 p.m. the call came in for an armed robbery of a cab driver. We were both around the corner and being a police officer we can't pick and choose what type of call we want or when we want to respond. As we approached, the cab driver walked toward us and gave a quick description of the suspects. I began to check the area with another Officer. We located an individual matching the description and a foot pursuit ensued. As we pursued the suspect down a dark alley he hid and waited around the corner gun in hand. I was approximately 50 feet behind my fellow officer. As we approached the corner the suspect emerged and opened fire striking my fellow

officer in the face and hands. He was flown to a Boston Hospital and after undergoing lifesaving surgery he was able to survive.

My point is, this is a day in the life of a police officer. We start our days and live our lives as most other people. But our lives are vastly different from most people. We are most likely to engage people at their most desperate of times. I have told parents that their teenage child won't be coming home as they drowned in the local quarry, I have told other families that their loved ones wouldn't be coming home because they died in car accidents, I have responded to horrific car accidents where people have been killed. Police officers are taxed with so many responsibilities, whether it is telling someone their loved one has died, or performing CPR on a child that drowned in a pool, or giving Narcan to an overdose victim or chasing down the suspect that just robbed the local convenient store. We are required to work nights, weekends and holidays. We are forced to work overtime shifts even if it is our child's birthday, Christmas etc. Being a police officer is not a job one takes to make a lot of money. It's long hours, working double shifts, or grabbing a couple extra construction details so your kids can get the braces they need, play club sports or to pay for the math tutor.

In every profession there are good employees and bad employees. There are over 700,000 Police Officers in the country. Many politicians have portrayed the local police officer as a thug that violates the rights of the law abiding citizen. This could not be further from the truth. How can we possibly judge the law enforcement officers of Massachusetts by the inexcusable, grotesque act committed by an officer thousands of miles away in Minnesota? Why are we being judged because the uniform we wear and the profession we chose? Isn't this the type of behavior that we prohibit, profiling and judging individuals because of their race, nationality, sexual orientation and the uniform they may wear? Why are we placing all officers under one umbrella? What happened to judging someone by their character? And when they are judged by their character shouldn't it be left to the hierarchy of the organization and or local leaders to discipline their employees on an individual basis. Why am I sitting at home trying to explain to my family that I am not and my fellow co-workers are not what is portrayed in the media? This bill being pushed through is clearly out to punish law enforcement and to pacify those seeking to disrupt our society as we know it. Law enforcement needs your support and courage to stand up against the false rhetoric and vote against this bill and more specifically prevent law enforcement from losing their Qualified Immunity.

This bill is being pushed through at a rapid rate and was passed through Senate under the cover of darkness. This bill, if passed, will have a devastating negative impact on law enforcement. The police officers that have just started their careers will most likely leave for another profession, the older experienced police officers will take an early retirement and those that remain will only stay because they have too much time invested to leave. Each community will lose any proactive law enforcement and the officers that are left will respond only when called. Criminals will know they now have the upper hand. They will be fearless of being caught prior to committing any criminal acts as law enforcement will be encouraged to be reactive. The law enforcement officers will not chance losing their life savings to prevent the sale of drugs (heroin), the theft of merchandise or approaching the suspicious person walking in YOUR neighborhood. The stakes are too high. We go to work knowing we may not return home, but know if that day comes our families will receive the financial assistance to move on. We will now have to worry about the possibility of defending our life savings at every call and encounter with the public. The stress and mental toll on each officer will be too much and everyone in the community will pay the price.

With these stories and opinions in mind I hope you can understand the frustration in the law enforcement community when we have become the target of politicians that would rather pander for votes as opposed to supporting the good hard working police officers of their communities.

Respectfully,

Timothy O'Toole  
Husband/Father/Son/Brother and Police Officer