



BREWSTER POLICE DEPARTMENT

Chief Heath J. Eldredge

631 Harwich Road

Brewster, Massachusetts 02631

Phone 508-896-7011 www.brewsterpolice.org Fax 508-896-4513



July 17, 2020

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:

As a chief of police here in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, I stand behind the pledge to protect and serve my entire community, to include those that are routinely underserved, overlooked, or mistreated. I have dedicated my career to be in position to make a difference in people's lives and help wherever I can.

In recognizing the great authority bestowed upon police officers, I expect and welcome oversight and accountability from the community. It is the community we serve that gives us legitimacy. Sir Robert Peele said it in 1829, and it remains true that, "the ability of the police to perform their duties is dependent upon public approval of police existence, actions, behavior and the ability of the police to secure and maintain public respect."

With all of that in mind, I also recognize the complexity of police work and how to best serve our diverse communities. Changes to the profession of policing requires great care, thought, and analysis because the stakes are so high.

Many of the details within SB2820 will seemingly change the face of policing in such a way as to seriously inhibit the recruitment and retention of the kind of officer we want serving our community. The Massachusetts Chiefs of Police have provided a detailed response to this bill with highlights of their concerns, and I support those points. That being said I also wanted to briefly weigh in with my own thoughts. Due to the short time frame on submitting testimony, I will limit my remarks to just the portion of the bill that speaks to qualified immunity.

By eliminating qualified immunity, officers who are trying to do the right thing and acting in good faith will be exposed to personal lawsuits at a level that will likely stifle good police work that safeguards our citizens. This will discourage promising young people from considering a career in policing and will encourage veteran officers to run from a career that they have cherished. We have been fortunate to see many amazing police officers who have served with honor, remain working beyond the minimum requirement for retirement. These officers remain in their positions and serve as leaders inside and outside of their departments, as well as mentors for new officers coming in. I worry that by stripping away the minor protections afforded through qualified immunity (which is far from total immunity), many of these leaders will recognize that the personal risk now outweighs the reward of serving their

"In Partnership With Our Community"



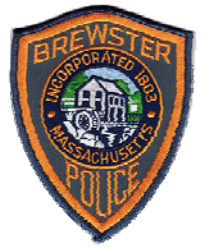
BREWSTER POLICE DEPARTMENT

Chief Heath J. Eldredge

631 Harwich Road

Brewster, Massachusetts 02631

Phone 508-896-7011 www.brewsterpolice.org Fax 508-896-4513



community and they will walk away. This would cause a burden not only on the departments but on the communities they hold dear.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

Heath J. Eldredge

Chief Heath J. Eldredge

"In Partnership With Our Community"