



# *Town of Mansfield Police Department*

*500.A East Street, Mansfield, Massachusetts 02048*

*Police Chief  
Ronald A. Sellon*

Chair Claire Cronin, and Chair Aaron Michlewitz,

I want to begin by saying thank you for accepting testimony on behalf of this bill. My name is Ronald Sellon and I am the Police Chief for the Town of Mansfield, a distinction I have had for 7 years. I want to begin by saying I have vocally and forcefully condemned the killing of George Floyd and I have been a strong advocate for change for 20 years within the profession. Over the course of my career I have advocated for many changes in the paradigm of policing. Here in Mansfield, we take a team oriented approach to addressing quality of life and crime concerns in the community. This means that we approach each case on an individual basis and try to determine root cause with our Problem Oriented Policing team. As an example, in combatting the opioid epidemic, whenever there is an overdose the first goal is to provide medical assistance and treatment /rehab support because we know we cannot arrest ourselves out of such problems. To achieve this, we believe that empowering the families and friends with resources and support will provide a much better outcome of results than the traditional arrest-and-incarceration alternative. To do this, we team with organizations like [Learn to Cope](#) to provide family support, and the [SAFE Coalition](#) to provide an up-to-the-minute listing of open beds at rehabilitation facilities. Both of these are volunteer organizations and to assist them in funding we arranged support through our Rotary club, thus using the community to find solutions and build partnerships. While the national and state drop in overdoses was approximately 5%, Mansfield was at **28%** proving our approach worked better. I bring this up for a few reasons, first that I am not just saying “we are different and reform minded” but actually showing it. Secondly, it illustrates that any approach to reform must have an evidence-based quantifiable way to show it worked or didn’t work. Lastly, the approach resulted in Mansfield being awarded the [International Association of Chief of Police \(IACP\) Community Policing award for 2019](#). The IACP is the largest Police executive organization in the world representing 40,000 Police executives globally. Again, I don’t say this to show off, but to point out that there are those of us who are reform minded and eager to make progress right here in Massachusetts, and the Senate ignored us, despite tangible proof that we have working models of police reforms that should be looked at and paid attention to across our state. We are not Minneapolis, or Ferguson and yet, the Senate treated us like we are.

When given an opportunity to sit on a committee for the IACP, I chose the Human and Civil Rights Committee. I did this so that I could tackle head on many of the issues that we are facing as a profession within our communities. As part of that committee, I was selected to be on the working group that redeveloped the Community Guide to [Enhance the Response to Hate Crimes](#), where along with the Lawyers committee for Civil Rights as well as over 20 other advocacy organizations we developed the guide over multiple meetings. In this capacity I have had the privilege to work closely with organizations like them, as well as others such as the Anti-Defamation League, the ARC, and many others with the goal



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of strengthening civil rights response and support. As the sole Massachusetts Chief on the committee I think I could provide insight as we have developed white papers on a number of topics including: Ensuring Constitutional-based force policies, Consent decree analysis of the use of electronic control weapons, Use of force investigations, Citizen Complaint process, and Early intervention systems. Again, I was provided no opportunity to supply testimony to the Senate.

The Senate bill 2820 is a terminally flawed document that will do far more harm than it portends to correct, and I will attempt to be succinct in my approach as I know you have many other documents to address. The issue of qualified immunity is a complicated one that must be examined with legal scholars. As both a Police Chief, and an attorney who is admitted to practice in Boston Federal court, I can say that it is not something that can be casually dismissed (as the Senate is attempting to do) without significant financial ramifications. I would ask that [Attorney Keston's rather well-written summary of the law and its impacts](#) be reviewed as a critical piece of evidence. The Senate seeks to create a mechanism through the state courts that will cripple communities financially while providing little in the way of true reform that better people's lives. To the contrary, it will cause a mass retreating from progressive policies and a defensive retrenched mindset will be solidified. This is to say nothing of the significant impact it will have on recruitment and retention of **good** employees which will suffer. In the end, the issue of qualified immunity can best be summarized in the statistic that under the current law, only approximately 4% of cases are dismissed at the federal level due to qualified immunity rulings by judges. Taking it away at the state level will create a larger problem than it attempts to solve. It is commonly being described as absolute immunity, a concept that Judges and District Attorneys have, which it is **not**.

Other concerning elements of the bill involve the banning of certain information sharing between the schools and police which I believe should be better left to the local communities. In Mansfield we have a strong relationship with our schools, and support their first goal of providing a safe and comfortable environment for the children there. All 3 of my children have attended or are currently attending the Mansfield Schools including one who has special needs. Understanding the special needs community, we have endeavored to reach out to them and crafted a special needs response that has as its goal to tailor a response to a particular child and family needs. To accomplish this we have worked closely with the Special Education Parent's Advisory Council and the School department. This relationship exposes us to a great amount of information. Information is the lifeblood of Community Policing, and restricting access to it for people who are tasked with helping is a dangerous practice.

The IACP issued a statement on the misguided approaches to Police Reform that the senate bill falls squarely into. It articulates that measures are being taken that will drive wedges between the communities and the police departments that serve them. Any proposed solutions should begin with the three-fold approach of: 1. whether this is the measure of success, 2. Is this what the community wants,



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and 3. What is the evidentiary basis to this point. Comprehensive Police reform is a topic I have spent an entire career trying to study and enact. Here in Mansfield, I have worked closely with advocacy organizations and social workers to provide real-time solutions to the quality of life and crime issues that our community members face. As part of our partnership with [New Hope](#), they funded a position through a grant that provided a social worker who was dedicated to the area police departments as a resource for our domestic violence response, which is oriented towards support, and coordination of resources. When that grant ran out, we feared losing that position and immediate contact with that organization- one we leaned on regularly for assistance. When a civilian position became available in my department, we hired that social worker, allowing her to continue her work. Discussing it with Marcia Szymanski, the regional director we found this to be a solution that benefits not only our PD and New Hope (so we can continue that partnership), but also (and more importantly) our community members. Any Police reform act should include an expansion of grant opportunities to hire civilian staff in areas of specialization such as Domestic and family violence, opioid and other addiction, and mental health. As a society, we need officers to be readily available to respond, but access to advanced subject matter experts in the fields is also critical.

Partnerships, coupled with a community oriented mindset, and entrepreneur's heart to reimagine solutions will carry the day, not law suits and exclusion of information. Any law and Police reform act should have as its basic tenet the goal to engender team and coordination concepts, not create new fiefdoms and exclude. I recently was featured in [Police Chief Magazines 2020 "Great Ideas" edition](#) talking about some of these topics.

What is being discussed at its core is a fundamental reimagining of the business model of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Police department, and this has been my passion for over 20 years. I ask you to seize on this opportunity to provide a bill that builds off of the successes of the agencies as I have described here and doesn't use the opportunity to provide damaging rhetoric to an already uncivil national conversation. I hope to hear from you on this topic(s) I have discussed in the near and distant future.

Respectfully,

Ronald Sellon

Police Chief

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