

Proponent Testimony
for
Senate Bill 37
by
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Past President, Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police (2010-2011)

Chairwoman Aneilski and members of the committee I am Michael Harnishfeger, Chief of Police of Ada, Ohio and Past President of the Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police. I am here to express the Association's support for S.B. 37.

Please let me begin by giving you a little information about my background and hopefully this will give you an idea as to why the Association and more than 86% of Ohio's Police Chiefs are fully supportive of police chief specific training.

In 1993, at the age of 29-years-old, I became the Chief of Police for the Village of Fort Shawnee, Ohio after serving as a part-time police officer for nearly 9 years. This chief's position was my first full-time police position and my first full-time supervisory position.

I'll never forget my first day as chief of police; I walked into the office with no supervisor education or any idea of the laws governing the chiefs job. There on the desk was a badge that said "Chief of Police" and the keys to the city. From that moment on I was in charge of a 20-officer department and any important or critical decisions to be made regarding the safety and security of our community ultimately came to me, including, even life and death decisions.

As years progressed I quickly educated myself to rules, regulations and laws which governed my position and those of village government. I discovered the importance of policy and procedure, police and community relations, human resource issues and budgeting. On the job I learned about Equal Opportunity Employment Regulations and the hiring process. I discovered that there were laws about public records, records retention schedules and a myriad of other administrative details that I had never known about. I never knew because no one had ever informed me.

As I progressed in knowledge, experience and education I quickly discovered that my story was not unique and sadly, this story is rather common place in many police agencies even today.

Chairwoman Aneilski and members, I would submit to you that the position of Police Chief is one of the most important positions in our communities. As exemplified by the numerous police/community relations issues prevalent in the news today, it is imperative that our police chiefs get a head start in the job; we can no longer rely on "learn as you go" for our modern day police chiefs.

SB 37 would mandate that a person selected to the position of chief of police would attend a 40-hour New Chief of Police Training within 6 months of his or her appointment. This critically important training would be foundational to the duties of police chief and set the chief's career from a position of core knowledge.

After nearly 18 months of meetings with personnel from the Ohio Peace Officer Training Commission and a number of Ohio Police Chiefs, a core curriculum was presented to the Commission that includes diversity training with an emphasis on historical perspectives and community-police relations, fundamentals of local governments, ethics, EEOC matters, sexual harassment issues, implicit bias, procedural justice, records retention and public records, situational leadership, budgeting, recruitment, hiring and retention, policy and procedure development and supervising police personnel. Along with these important topics new police chiefs shall also receive instruction on Ohio-specific issues that all chiefs must adhere to, including continuing education requirements and Ohio Peace Officer Training Commission reporting requirements for police officer appointments and terminations.

Recognizing that many newly appointed police chiefs come from agencies where leadership training is offered and pursued throughout the course of the new chief's career, SB 37 has provisions to allow a well-trained chief to be exempt from all but 16 hours of the required training. The final 16 hours will deal with Ohio-specific laws, rules and regulations as well as the most critical issues facing our newly appointed chiefs.

We realize that 40-hours of training will not make a police chief, however, SB 37 offers our newly appointed police chiefs a solid foundation and resources from which to pull at the start of their police chief career.

Nearly 72% of Ohio's police agencies are made up of 20 or less police officers with many agencies hiring "whoever is next in line", regardless of leadership training. We need to give these men and women the foundation of chief-specific training at the beginning of their careers for the benefit of all of our communities.

Throughout my nearly 24-years as a police chief and having served a number of years on the Executive Committee of the Ohio Association of Chiefs of Police and our Professional Services Committee, I have had a number of occasions to be personally involved with Ohio chiefs who were simply uninformed as to certain aspects of their position or laws governing chiefs and/or local government. As I look back on these situations I cannot help but think that if they would have been given a foundation of training early on, many poor outcomes could have been avoided.

Ohioans deserve excellence in policing and that excellence starts with the chief of police. It is unfair to our chiefs and our communities to hand them a badge and tell them to "learn as you go".

Chairwoman Aneilski and members, I appreciate this opportunity to testify today in support of SB 37. The Senate unanimously passed SB 37 with 25 co-sponsors, this important piece of legislation is also endorsed by the Attorney General. I ask for your support as well. This concludes my testimony and if there are any questions, I will be happy to answer them.