

House Committee on Federalism
The Rev. Francis Miller, Presbyterian Pastor, Police Chaplain
House Committee on Federalism Hearing on H.B. #178
June 5, 2019

Dear members of the Federalism Committee, thank you for allowing me time to speak with you.

I am coming to you as a member of the clergy. I am a pastor serving a Presbyterian Church in Lyndhurst, OH, and I am also a Chaplain serving the police department in Mentor, OH.

I recently completed two days of training at the Ohio Peace Officers Training Academy. Our trainers were veteran chaplains who served in the aftermath of 9/11, and were integral in starting up chaplaincy programs in their hometowns, in order to nurture to the spiritual, emotional, and psychological well-being of the officers in their communities. In those 18 years, they have seen a lot. And they wanted to impress upon us the depth of stress our first responders endure.

To that end, they showed us several videos of footage from bodycams and dashcams to illustrate how seemingly innocuous situations can turn dangerous quickly. In one instance, an officer was facing off with someone on a sidewalk and telling him to put down his assault rifle. Just after we see the man lay his weapon on the ground, to our shock we see the officer shoot the would-be assailant. Why? One of his fellow officers had turned the corner behind the assailant and saw that, as the man was putting down his weapon, he was reaching behind back to pull out a handgun. The officer behind shouted "gun," and the first officer put the man down.

We endured several of these scenarios from traffic stops to domestic situations. I came away from that training with renewed respect for the way first responders have to approach each call - minds completely open, ready for anything. I also came away from the experience shaking my head at the creative ways people can find a way to conceal a weapon and coldly, and coolly, wait until the opportune moment to use it; giving off no signals.

I am concerned for the well-being of our first responders. H.B. #178 eliminates requirements that a concealed weapons licensee or qualified military member notify a law enforcement officer that the person is authorized to carry a concealed handgun and is then carrying a handgun when stopped. It also, specifies that the mere fact that an otherwise law-abiding person carries or possesses a deadly weapon, other than a restricted deadly weapon, does not constitute grounds for any law enforcement officer to search, seize, or detain the person, no matter how temporarily.

Our law enforcement officers have enough to worry about - I cannot see around that fact that by raising the availability of guns to be concealed and carried by people who don't even need to declare they have them on their person, nor allows an officer to use their judgement to search, seize, or detain someone, we are raising the vulnerability of our officers, who already have so much to be aware of.

Thank you for your time. I urge you all to please not allow H.B. #178 to go any further.