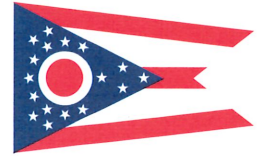




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Testimony on House Bill 109

House Criminal Justice Committee

April 22, 2021

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Chairman LaRe, Vice-Chair Swearingen, Ranking Member Leland, and Members of the Committee,

My name is Mike Weinman; I am a retired Columbus police officer who now serves as the director of government affairs for the FOP. Today, I appear before you to give proponent testimony on House Bill 109 on behalf of our 24,000 members.

House Bill 109 allows officers to take civil action for a civil rights abridgment, false complaint, and certain crimes regarding conduct directed towards officers, their family members, or co-workers at a public emergency. Law enforcement officers have been subjected to Doxing, verbal threats, harassment, and physical attacks with everything from frozen water bottles, stones and bricks, homemade shields, chemical sprays, fireworks, laser pointers, and a firearm. As a result of the protests/riots that occurred following George Floyd's death, Columbus officers alone filed over 200 OBWC claims for injuries. Had it not been for his Kevlar helmet, a Cincinnati officer may have been killed during a protest/riot when he was shot in the head.

In one incident, 21 Columbus police officers were injured by an individual who launched fireworks at them. That individual had his bail reduced to \$10,000 and was released. Also, I want to draw your attention to an article I have attached to my testimony that appeared in the Columbus Dispatch. The Dispatch interviewed several police officers of color and brought attention to the terrible things that were said to these officers and how they were treated during the protests/riots. An officer of color recently had his face cut open by an individual who stormed and gained access to Columbus police headquarters. That individual was armed with a club and used it to strike the officer.

Complaints against officers became more weaponized during the protest/riots over the spring and summer of 2020. Scores of complaints were only intended to harass and intimidate officers. In some cases, complaints against officers came in from persons thousands of miles away based solely on what they had seen on social media. The verbal harassment and attacks on officers weren't confined to downtown streets and squares. It appeared in social media, and in some cases, followed them home. One officer spoke about how his children became targets of harassment and bullying at school.

Chairman Jeff LaRe

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Unfortunately, the bill has been framed by some as a choice between protecting the right to protest or protecting police officers. These two things are not mutually exclusive. The bill strikes a balance by allowing peaceful protesting and protecting officers against rioters. It is troubling to the FOP when leaders suggest you cannot protest without harming police officers. HB 109 allows an officer to take action against rioters when activist prosecutors refuse to act. Therefore, the FOP respectfully asks that the committee favorably report HB 109.