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Bekky Baker

2604 Harris Ave. Cincinnati, OH

Senate Bill 53: Lower the minimum age of peace officers

Opponent Testimony - All Party Testimony

Written Testimony Only

Chair Roegner, Vice Chair Antani, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Government Oversight Committee,

Thank you for receiving my written testimony today. I am writing to express my opposition to Senate Bill 53 to lower the minimum age for peace officers. As a social worker who has studied psychological development, it feels irresponsible to send 18 year olds, whose prefrontal cortexes are not fully developed, out into emotionally charged and intense situations. Age limitations are a good thing and are an important piece of harm reduction in policing -- both for the police, and for the policed. I fear if we lower the minimum age for police officers we are setting our communities up for more potential harm and violence.

In most states throughout the US, the minimum age for an officer is 21. To echo the sentiments of the police chief in my city of Cincinnati, 18 year olds do not have the emotional maturity to enter into life or death situations. In addition, these crisis situations have the potential to expose these young people to traumatic experiences that can alter their emotional responses and neural pathways.

There are better ways to reduce violence in our communities such as focusing on the training peace officers receive and funding the community supported safety programs that are preventative rather than reactionary. Reducing violence is intricately connected to working within the communities experiencing violence to champion their own solutions and to do that with programs like violence interrupters. Additionally, I encourage adding the requirement of passing a mental health screening to the requirements for becoming a police officer. If the goal of this bill is to add more police officers out in the streets to create safe communities, we can do that by instead focusing on community centered interventions. Let's focus on hospital violence interruption programs, aiding community leaders in delivering violence disruption programs, and employing community members as change agents.

Thank you for your time,
Bekky Baker, MSW