



April 17th, 2023

Dear Chairwoman Roegner, Vice-Chair Antani, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the Senate Government Oversight Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer opponent testimony for Senate Bill 53.

My name is Minister Blyth Barnow. I am the founder of HEAL Ohio, an organization building unlikely alliances to save lives lost to the drug war across the state of Ohio. I am here today because I strongly oppose SB 53.

I have the privilege of working with Ohioans across the state. Many of the folks I work with are grieving the senseless loss of a loved one, whether to an accidental overdose or to violent policing. The grief has some similarities, there is anger, pain, regret, and a terrible feeling that this death was preventable. Because, of course it was.

Far too many Ohioans have lost their lives to supposed “Peace” officers. It has broken the hearts of families, communities, and our state. As a faith leader it seems to me that the reason we do not have enough people to fill law enforcement vacancies has more to do with the nature and consequences of harmful policing, than it does with a simple labor shortage. Ohioans do not want to be part of harming their neighbors or our state. It is the lack of accountability and avoided reform in police departments across the state that has caused this labor shortage. Dropping the age limit to become a police officer is not the solution. Meaningful, community informed, transformation of the current policing system in Ohio is the solution.

Ohio’s children deserve the chance to be children and mature into adults that enrich their community. They do not deserve to be on either end of a policeman's gun. 18 year olds do not deserve to be thrown into volatile situations that they are not yet prepared to face. Situations that have the possibility to alter their life, and end another. Brain development continues through the early to mid-20s; a research-based consensus acknowledged within academia, criminal justice, and policing.¹ The last areas to develop are the regions that control a person’s ability to weigh risks and consequences, plan ahead, make complicated decisions, and demonstrate self control.²

¹ Compare Teen Brain: Preparing your officers to engage with youth, National Policing Institute, August 2016, Compare with Fn 2; Fn 3; Fn 7; and Maturation of the Adolescent Brain, Neuropsychiatric Disease & Treatment, 2013, Arain (addressing adolescent brain development through age 24) (<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3621648/#>).

² Laurence Steinberg, Should the Science of Adolescent Brain Development Inform Public Policy?, Issues in Science and Technology (Spring 2012). See also, Effects of Adolescent Development on Policing, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2015 (<https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/library/publications/effects-adolescent-development-policing>)



Put another way, developing brains during this period are different from fully developed adults in how they are influenced by chemicals produced by the body; they are more likely to engage in risky and impulsive behavior, experience mood swings, or have reactions stronger or weaker than a situation warrants.³

SB 53 is short sighted and irresponsible. I urge you to oppose SB 53 and vote no if given the opportunity.

Prayerfully,

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³ Applying Research to Practice Brief: What Are the Implications of Adolescent Brain Development for Juvenile Justice?, Coalition for Juvenile Justice (2006)
(http://www.juvjustice.org/sites/default/files/resource-files/resource_138_0.pdf)