



LAW ENFORCEMENT ACTION PARTNERSHIP

ADVANCING JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY SOLUTIONS

121 Mystic Avenue, Suite 9
Medford, Massachusetts 02155
T: (781) 393.6985

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Lieutenant Diane Goldstein, Ret.
Nevada, USA

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Deputy Chief Wayne Harris, Ret.
Chair, New York, USA

Major Neill Franklin, Ret.
Treasurer, Florida, USA

Professor Jody Armour
Secretary, California, USA

Sergeant Terry Blevins, Fmr.
California, USA

Chief Mike Butler, Ret.
Colorado, USA

Ms. Nadine Jones
New Jersey, USA

Captain Leigh Maddox, Ret.
Maryland, USA

Captain Sonia Y.W. Pruitt, Ret.
Maryland, USA

Superintendent Richard N. Van Wickler, Ret.
New Hampshire, USA

Detective Sergeant Neil Woods, Ret.
Derbyshire, England, LEAP UK

Date: February 07, 2022

Re: SB 216, Dylan's Law/Substance-Exposed Infants & Parental Custody

Position: OPPOSE

To: Chairman Manning

Vice-Chair McColley

Ranking Member Thomas

Senate Judiciary Committee

Dear Chairman Manning, Vice-Chair McColley, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the Senate Judiciary Committee, thank you for the opportunity to offer opponent testimony for SB 216.

I am writing today in opposition of SB 216, which would make substance use during pregnancy constitute child abuse by expanding the definition of "abused child" to include "a substance-exposed infant." I represent myself, having spent my career as a police officer, and the Law Enforcement Action Partnership (LEAP).

LEAP is a nonprofit group of police, prosecutors, judges, and other criminal justice professionals who speak from firsthand experience. Our mission is to make communities safer by focusing law enforcement resources on the greatest threats to public safety and working toward healing police-community relations.

I oppose SB 216 because this law would inadvertently lead to fewer women seeking critical prenatal care services for fear of losing custody of their children. While I agree that we should offer voluntary treatment services to pregnant women with Substance Abuse Disorder, coercive measures such as proposed by Dylan's Law will cause more harm than good by endangering the health and well-being of both the developing human and expectant mother. Additionally, it has been [reported](#) that postpartum women who retain custody of their newborns remain in treatment longer, completing

treatment at much higher rates than women who lose custody of their newborn.

As a police officer, I have seen firsthand how families are affected when parents and guardians are arrested, and those families are separated. Young people suffer psychologically, educationally, and financially when they are separated from their mothers. Furthermore, [studies](#) demonstrate the importance of parental presence in early infancy, with parental involvement closely tied to an infant's emotional development.

If passed, I fear that SB 216 will exacerbate the [existing problems](#) within our child welfare systems. When children are suddenly removed from the custody of parents, they are vulnerable and more likely to suffer abuse. They can become victims of neglect and harm, ultimately perpetuating cycles of addiction and incarceration.

Children who have adverse childhood experiences, such as violence or incarcerated parents, experience trauma. These children are more prone to future violence and addiction. A study of [adverse childhood experiences \(ACEs\)](#) showed their impact on the physical and mental health problems of 17,000 adults. Make no mistake about it, infants can [experience trauma](#) and are also affected if their main caregiver is suffering consequences of trauma.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my experience in opposition to this bill.

Chief Tom Thompson
Sinclair Community College Public Safety Department
Former Assistant Chief
Miamisburg Police Department, OH
Speaker, Law Enforcement Action Partnership