



Senator Theresa Gavarone

2nd Ohio Senate District

Sponsor Testimony for Senate Concurrent Resolution 16

Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee

September 1, 2020

Chairman Coley, Vice-Chair Huffman, Ranking Member Craig, and fellow members of the Senate Government Oversight and Reform Committee, I am happy to be before you today to speak about Senate Concurrent Resolution 16, my legislation that declares opposition to efforts to defund law enforcement and calls for justice for victims of excessive force by police.

Over the past few months after several horrific examples of excessive force being used on Americans by police, there has been a movement to defund law enforcement. While it is a position held by a small minority, there are still cities across the country that have chosen to all but gut their police departments. Recent examples include the Austin, Texas City Council cutting \$150 million or 1/3 of their police budget, New York slashing \$1 billion from their police, and Los Angeles and San Francisco combined approving a decrease of more than a quarter billion dollars.ⁱ This is dangerous.

Thankfully, no cities in Ohio that I am aware of have fallen into this trap. Yet. Right now mayors across the state realize the positive impact that police officers have on our communities and with the senseless violence that is occurring across the country, mainly by political agitators, we need a well-trained police force more than ever.

Ohioans are intelligent and understand what the police mean to our quality of life. A poll taken in June shows that 82% of voters approve of the way police in their community are doing their job. The police have a job approval of 63% in cities, 72% in suburbs and 80% in rural areas—numbers that any of us would be happy to achieve.ⁱⁱ While the media chooses to focus on the rare, horrible acts committed by police, our constituents realize they are only getting a small part of the story.

A common argument I've heard from people is that defunding the police doesn't mean eliminating them. That is inaccurate because there is certainly a faction of people advocating for that. However, that is not what I mean when I say "defunding" the police though. I am talking about cutting police budgets outright (which I oppose) or diverting money to boost social services (which I also oppose). I certainly support funding for social services, but I draw that line at compromising resources dedicated to

our police to make it happen. And it's not just me. That poll I referenced earlier revealed that 6/10 voter oppose diverting police department money to social services. It's easy to understand why.

Police are trained to make split second decisions to protect us. They are always on high-alert, particularly when they can't see someone or a person's hands are not visible. Sending untrained, unarmed social workers into dangerous areas without the training a police officer has acquired is a recipe for disaster.

However, I am not just here to talk about defunding the police. I am here to show support for victims of excessive force, too. As stated in lines 18 through 21, "Law enforcement officers who abuse their positions, engage in corruption, employ excessive force, or exhibit bias betray the public trust and undermine the rule of law." I interact with law enforcement regularly and there is not a single person more disgusted by bad behavior of law enforcement than law enforcement.

In fact, many members of law enforcement that I've spoken to have vocalized their interest in adopting certain reforms. They want to be a part of the solution that weeds out the few bad officers that ruin their profession's reputation. But it is important to ensure that actual officers are part of those reform discussions. Any conversations taking place regarding police reform that don't include actual police participation are not serious and doomed for failure.

We need to have the tough conversations. No one should be subjected to excessive force. But no one should have to fear for their safety because their elected officials cut funding to their police department. Less funding means fewer officers. Less funding also means less training. Less training without a doubt will lead to more instances of excessive force.

We expect law enforcement officers to do their job the right way. That job is preserving public order, peace, and individual rights. Defunding the police makes that job impossible and is simply not good public policy.

Chairman Coley and members of the Government Oversight and Reform Committee, thank you for your time and attention and I would be happy to answer any questions.

ⁱ At Least 13 Cities Are Defunding Their Police Departments-
<https://www.forbes.com/sites/jemimamcevoy/2020/08/13/at-least-13-cities-are-defunding-their-police-departments/#18551dea29e3>

ⁱⁱ Most Ohio Voters Approve of How Police Are Doing Their Jobs, Poll Finds-
<https://www.cleveland.com/open/2020/06/most-ohio-voters-approve-of-how-police-are-doing-their-job-poll-finds.html>