



**Sponsor Testimony: House Bill 84**  
**Representative Steve Demetriou, 35th House District**  
**Representative Josh Williams, 41st House District**  
**House Homeland Security Committee**

Thank you Chairman Ghanbari, Vice Chairman Plummer, Ranking Member Thomas, and the rest of my colleagues on the Homeland Security Committee for the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony on House Bill 84. I would like to give additional thanks to my joint sponsor, Representative Joshua Williams, as well as Senators Kristina Roegner and Michelle Reynolds for encouraging us to introduce companion legislation in the House to Senate Bill 53.<sup>1</sup> This bill changes the age at which one is able to become a police officer from 21 to 18 years old, while still ensuring leaders within our police, sheriff, and highway patrol organizations still have the final say to hire the men and women who they deem best for the job.

One of the best parts of this bill is that it changes only one word in the Ohio Revised Code: “twenty one” would change to “eighteen” when this bill passes. Additionally, House Bill 84 is permissive, meaning it does not restrict sheriffs, post commanders, or chiefs of police in their hiring decisions. Instead, it offers our police leaders more options when it comes to filling their ranks.

Like nearly all industries and professions across Ohio, and the rest of the United States, our police organizations in the Buckeye state have faced hiring shortages and challenges during the past months and years.<sup>2</sup> While House Bill 84 is not the end all to the human resource challenges our police departments face, it does give police chiefs of departments big and small another option to utilize when considering candidates to fill vacant rolls in their respective forces. House Bill 84 simply provides another tool in their toolkit in terms of hiring.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://ohiohouse.gov/legislation/135/sb53>

<sup>2</sup> [Cleveland Police Shortages Article](#), [Central Ohio Police Shortages](#).

Fourteen states across the country, including our neighbors such as Michigan, West Virginia and Pennsylvania, already allow for 18 year olds to serve as police officers. Other states such as California, Washington, and Vermont have also followed suit.<sup>3</sup>

We have allowed 18 year olds to serve and protect us in dangerous, high stress, and dynamic environments since the inception of our country. As a twenty something year old reconnaissance platoon leader in the Army, I deployed to Afghanistan with multiple young men under the age of twenty one under my charge. We operated in small teams, and had very strict rules of engagement. I relied on them to make decisions, at times on their own, that I hoped would honor our mission and values. They didn't let me down.

I leave you with this one question: if we are ok with sending young men and women to protect us in far away lands, while oftentimes making the ultimate sacrifice for our country, what's holding us back from allowing them to protect us in our own communities here in Ohio?

Thank you for allowing me to provide sponsor testimony today. I would like to invite my joint sponsor, Representative Josh Williams, to tell you more about the benefits of House Bill 84.

As Representative Demetriou mentioned, we are experiencing a workforce crisis in law enforcement departments across the nation and even here at home in the great state of Ohio. Many departments are challenged with staffing shortages that have been classified as "mega-crisis." Many of us have watched as the "defund the police" movement began to spread. With ever increasing calls to remove funding to local police departments and reallocate those funds to other social services, moral within our departments have hit a rock bottom.<sup>4</sup> This has resulted in recruiting challenges, mass resignations, buyouts and standard retirements. Those shortages have forced smaller departments into relying on lateral transfers to combat their own staffing shortages while creating shortages in the local municipal police departments they recruit from.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.fox19.com/2023/03/04/new-bill-would-allow-18-year-olds-become-police-officers-ohio/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://abc6onyourside.com/news/local/police-families-in-central-ohio-say-officer-morale-is-at-rock-bottom>

This bill is a common sense solution that would allow all Ohio law enforcement agencies to make the same decisions that many municipalities already make under their “home rule” authority. Currently, certain municipalities across Ohio already have the authority to hire 18-21 year olds under the home rule provision established in Article XVIII, Section 7 of the Ohio Constitution. In addition to Columbus, who hires officers at 20 years old and Akron who hires at 20 and a half years old, fourteen other states already allow their law enforcement departments to hire 18 year olds.

In Ohio 18-year-olds can already become firefighters and sign up to defend this nation in the U.S. Military, but in many instances they are prohibited from becoming police officers and helping to protect their communities. 18-year-olds are permitted to enroll in Ohio’s Peace Officer Training Academy and many law enforcement training programs across the state, yet they must wait three years before they can be hired as a sworn peace officer.

Allowing officers to join law enforcement agencies at 18 rather than 21 is a solution to our workforce crisis that provides authority to local governments in Ohio to choose what is the best solution to solve their staffing shortages. We are merely giving them another tool that they can use to handle this crisis.

Both Representative Demetriou and I appreciate the opportunity to provide sponsor testimony in support of House Bill 84. We encourage the Homeland Security Committee to consider this legislation and we welcome any questions or concerns. Thank you.