



Chair Ghanbari, Vice Chair Plummer, Ranking Member Thomas, and members of the House Homeland Security Committee,

Thank you for allowing me to testify today. My name is Emily Cole and I am the Executive Director of Ohio Families Unite for Political Action and Change, or OFUPAC. OFUPAC was started by Ohio families directly impacted by the criminalization of poverty, police brutality, incarceration, and the criminal legal system here in Ohio. I am here today to stand with and for our families in strong opposition to House Bill 84.

House Bill 84 is simple on its face, only changing a couple of words in an otherwise straightforward statute. And yet, this change would significantly alter the landscape of policing in Ohio, endorsing arming 18 year olds with a badge and a gun and sending them, often unsupervised after academy, into communities across the state. We've heard during contentious testimony from bill sponsors this is in response to the lack of candidates wanting to serve Ohioans as peace officers, and that we are facing a critical hiring shortage.

Most research into improving community-police relations actually shows *raising* the minimum age to serve from 21 to 25 improves public safety. Further, increasing the minimum hiring age from 21 to 25 years of age only eliminated 27.9% of successful applicants.

Removing the politicized nature of policing from the equation, the facts are very clear. Current police minimum hiring age policies contribute to policing harms. Scientifically, 19 year olds have reached the age of majority in the US but do not have fully matured brains until around the age of 25. From 19 to 25, young adults have limited capacity for self-regulating and impulse control; are more reactive under negative stresses; and more sensitive to peer pressure.

Currently, 23 states across the US have a minimum service age of 21, Ohio included. Typical requirements by state legislatures across US include: high school diploma or some college education; health as measured by either fitness tests, a physical exam by a physician, or both; moral character; lack of criminal history; lack of dishonorable discharges from the military; mental health examinations or personality testing; background checks; minimum and maximum age requirements; and, statements of



compliance with ethical codes. Ohio simply includes an age minimum and a physical health screening requirement.

Studies in police shootings show older officers are considerably less likely to engage in shootings than younger officers. Police pursuits by officers under age forty were more likely to result in an accident, while pursuits by officers in their twenties were more likely to end in injury. Younger officers also make more arrests than older officers, and studies show younger officers may struggle to maintain productive relationships in the community. All of these outcomes are counter towards improving community-police relations.

In a time when most harmful interactions with police are blamed on “a few bad apples”, shifting the culture within departments remains paramount. Studies show younger officers’ lack of developmental maturity make them ill-equipped to police our streets and have the potential to set them on a course to adopt warrior-cop mindsets throughout their careers. We all know the work of an officer exposes them to significant stress and trauma. A significant number of police use avoidant coping mechanisms rather than healthy ones, decreasing their wellness and well-being. Officers sometimes struggle with mental health, manifesting through high PTSD rates and higher than expected suicide rates. Younger adults between the ages of 19 and 25 are more vulnerable than older adults to developing trauma symptoms and these long-term effects after traumatic events.

For all of these reasons, I ask you to consider my testimony and vote no on this dangerous bill. Let’s work together to create a culture around community safety that keeps everyone safer - both the police, and those policed.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I am happy to answer any questions you may have.

Sincerely,

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