

March 28, 2023

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

Thank you for allowing me to submit written testimony. My work schedule does not allow me to testify in person. My name is Jan Nespor. I am testifying as an individual, but for identification purposes only I am a professor of education at the Ohio State University. I write today to strongly oppose House Bill 84 and urge you to vote no.

HB 84 would respond to a supposed shortage of law enforcement officers by reducing the minimum employment age for officers to 18 years. A shortage occurs when one can't obtain something actually needed. The current situation is different. The problem is simply that "police departments are having difficulty hiring as many police officers as they have currently budgeted for."¹ One might claim a shortage if a) there was a rapidly growing crime rate, b) more police would reduce crime. But these claims are not true. Nationally there is no correlation between spending on police and crime rates.² According to the legislative budget office statistics, Ohio's violent crime rate is below the national average, its property crime rate has been declining for 10 years.³ And as Reuters (2022) notes "a growing line of research" shows "that police departments don't solve serious or violent crimes with any regularity, and in fact, spend very little time on crime control, in contrast to popular narratives"⁴

As the Marshall project points out,⁵ the number of law enforcement employees has indeed dropped by 4% nationally, but this number does not take into account the large rise in private police forces,⁶ - it is possible the overall number of police, private and public combined, may have risen.⁷ More importantly, the decline is not limited to policing: other government occupations -- bus drivers, fire fighters, sanitation workers, etc. -- have lost employees at a higher rate than police (5%)⁸. The reason is that opportunities are better in the private sector. The solution, if one were serious, would be to raise pay and improve conditions for government workers.

Lowering the employment age is not only the wrong response to a non-problem, it creates additional problems. By lowering the age of officers you increase the likelihood of extreme and violent police behavior. Evidence suggests that "older officers were considerably less likely to engage in shootings than younger officers"⁹ while younger officers were more likely to engage in coercive behavior¹⁰; in another

¹ <https://equalityalec.substack.com/p/a-shortage-of-punishment-bureaucrats>

² <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/06/07/over-past-60-years-more-spending-police-hasnt-necessarily-meant-less-crime/>

³ <https://www.lsc.ohio.gov/assets/organizations/legislative-service-commission/files/2022-ohio-facts-violent-and-property-crime-rates-10011668.pptx>

⁴ <https://www.reuters.com/legal/government/police-are-not-primarily-crime-fighters-according-data-2022-11-02/>; see also <https://prismreports.org/2022/02/23/police-dont-stop-crime-but-you-wouldnt-know-it-from-the-news/>

⁵ <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2023/01/21/police-hiring-government-jobs-decline>

⁶ <https://prospect.org/justice/rise-of-the-private-police/>

⁷ <https://www.policechiefmagazine.org/private-police-coming-to-a-neighborhood/>, <https://www.opb.org/article/2021/12/01/rise-of-private-security-firm-downtown-portland/>

⁸ <https://www.bls.gov/cew/>

⁹ McElvain, J. P., & Kposowa, A. J. (2008). Police officer characteristics and the likelihood of using deadly force. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 35(4), 505–521. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854807313995>

study "older officers" working in minority jurisdictions "had significantly greater odds of giving a warning or doing nothing . . . than making an arrest"¹¹ None of this, of course, is to suggest that the level of non-lethal encounters with police is acceptable.¹² What we as citizens need from you, the legislature, is not a poorly thought-out and counter-productive response to a non-problem. We need fewer police, jails, and prisons, and more investment in housing, education, health care, and restorative justice models

I ask you to consider my testimony and vote NO on this unnecessary and dangerous bill.

Sincerely,
Jan Nesor
jnespor@proton.me

¹⁰ Sun, I. Y., Payne, B. K., & Wu, Y. (2008). The impact of situational factors, officer characteristics, and neighborhood context on police behavior: A multilevel analysis. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 36(1), 22–32.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2007.12.004>; see also Feys, Y. (2023). *Worldwide Views on Police Discretion: A Scoping Review Regarding Police Decision-Making*. Springer. (p. 39)

¹¹ Dean A. Dabney, Brent Teasdale, Glen A. Ishoy, Taylor Gann & Bonnie Berry (2017) Policing in a Largely Minority Jurisdiction: The Influence of Appearance Characteristics Associated with Contemporary Hip-Hop Culture on Police Decision-Making, *Justice Quarterly*, 34:7, 1310-1338, DOI: 10.1080/07418825.2017.1382557

¹² Knox, D., Lowe, W., & Mummolo, J. (2020). Administrative records mask racially biased policing. *American Political Science Review*, 114(3), 619-637.