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Senate Government Oversight Committee

April 19, 2023

Testimony on Senate Bill 53

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Chair Roegner, Vice-Chair Antani, Ranking Member Hicks-Hudson, and members of the committee,

I am Mike Weinman, a retired Columbus police officer who serves as director of government affairs for the FOP. Thank you for allowing me to testify on behalf of the 23,000 FOP members from every corner of Ohio to give opposition to SB 53.

Police officers often find themselves thrust into complex situations whose outcomes could be catastrophic if not handled properly. Split-second decisions are made by officers who rely on their training and experience to guide them through these events and make difficult choices. Police work is more than just applying the law and following policies. Life experiences also affect how officers handle calls, including child support and people suffering from mental health episodes. Unfortunately, these situations and events can be traumatic. Studies have shown that an officer is exposed to more traumatic events in one month than an average American sees in their lifetime.

Research has also shown that 12 to 19-year-olds have an adolescent brain. They are still trying to figure out who they are and how they want others to see them. These adolescents are experiencing physical and emotional changes that can be pretty challenging. Scientists have determined that the brain isn't fully developed until age 25. Yet, SB 53 allows communities to put a badge and a gun on these teenagers.

While you heard testimony that teenagers in the military are already working as police officers, let me assure you that it is an entirely different environment. The Posse Comitatus Act prohibits military personnel from arresting civilians. Military members may detain a civilian, but they must contact civil law enforcement to make the arrest and pursue criminal charges. Military law enforcement issue federal traffic tickets to civilians, but for the most part, anything beyond a minor misdemeanor must be handled by civilian authorities.

For these reasons, the FOP is opposed to SB 53. We do not believe a teenager can be a police officer. We fear these officers, who can't purchase a beer, will be left to fend for themselves to handle challenging calls that could expose them to second-guessing and trauma.