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Judicial Proceedings Committee



THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
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Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
2 East Miller Senate Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Senate Bill – 18 – Police Retention Workgroup

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee,

Governor Moore has announced that public safety will be one of his top priorities. One of the crucial public safety issues at the moment is the fact that virtually every police department in the State is experiencing a record rate of vacancies among their uniformed officers. As a result, Maryland has, in effect, defunded its police without even passing a bill to implement such a policy.

We heard testimony from the Chief of Police of Baltimore City recently in which he reported that the Baltimore City Police Department has 465 vacancies at the moment. I understand from the Baltimore County Fraternal Order of Police that the Baltimore County Police Department has about 225 vacancies at this time. Around the State, similar record-breaking vacancies can be observed at many police departments.

Perhaps you read the article in the Baltimore Sun this past Sunday reporting that U. S. District Court Judge James K. Bredar, who is overseeing the policing Consent Decree between the City and the federal Justice Department, announced that “insufficient staffing is the Police Department’s biggest obstacle to achieving compliance with the Consent Decree. Judge Bredar stated that “it’s essential” that the Police Department “stop the bleeding” in terms of its recruitment and retention.

Independently, we learned last year at the hearing of a bill in this Committee that very few of Baltimore City’s police officers live in the City. Indeed, I have heard that a very high percentage of Baltimore County’s police officers live in southern Pennsylvania because they can’t afford to live in Baltimore County. Further, for years, we have heard that many police officers work two jobs because they can’t afford to live on the salaries that they are paid by the police departments.

Senate Bill 18 sets up the police retention workgroup with a charge to identify and examine issues and factors potentially contributing to the decline in police retention statewide.

This workgroup will be comprised of public officials, experts, and community members to generate a well-rounded understanding of the issue.

The workgroup is charged with quantifying the number of police officers retiring annually, the number of cadets completing police academy training annually, the current salary ranges for police officers in Maryland along with the current benefits and pension programs available to police officers. In addition, the workgroup will examine current training requirements for police officers, recruitment techniques being used at this time, the criteria being used for promotion and the impact of current State and local laws on policing and police departments. I will be submitting a short amendment to this bill that will also direct the workgroup to draw conclusions as to why the current vacancy rates on police forces are so high and to make recommendations to the General Assembly of measures that should be adopted to make Maryland's police forces the best trained, most effective and most highly professional police forces in the region, if not in the nation,

Senate Bill 18 does its best to establish a truly balanced workgroup. It includes two State Senators, two Delegates, the Secretary of the Department of State Police, the Attorney General, the Public Defender, the President of the Maryland State's Attorneys Association, a representative of the ACLU, a representative of the Fraternal Order of Police, a person with expertise in the field of effective policing and a citizen appointed by the Governor. The bill also assigns to the Governor the responsibility of designating the chair of the workgroup.

As elected officials, we have a responsibility to enact policy that empowers our institutions of public safety to protect us in a legal and professional manner. Senate Bill 18 will better inform us on how to do so.

I appreciate the Committee's consideration of Senate Bill 18 and will be more than happy to answer any follow-up questions the Committee may have.