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Judicial Proceedings Committee



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

February 1st, 2024
The Maryland State Senate Judicial Proceedings Committee
The Honorable William C. Smith, Jr.
2 East Miller Senate Building
Annapolis, Maryland 21401

Re: Senate Bill 380: *Police Recruitment and Retention Workgroup*

Dear Chairman Smith and Members of the Committee,

Under the current Rules of this Committee, this bill is a sponsor-only bill because last year, the bill passed out of this Committee unanimously and then passed unanimously on the floor of the State Senate. In the process, a Committee amendment was added to the bill, and four floor amendments were also added to the bill. Two of the floor amendments were sponsor amendments. The other two floor amendments, offered by Senator Smith and Senator Rosapepe as well as the Committee amendment have been included in this year's bill.

Permit me to briefly refresh your memories about this bill.

One of the most crucial public safety issues facing Maryland is the fact that virtually every police department in the State is experiencing a record rate of vacancies among their uniformed officers.

Last session, the Chief of Police of Baltimore City reported that the Baltimore City Police Department had over 450 vacancies. Today, one fifth of the authorized positions in the Baltimore City Police Department are vacant. I understand from the Baltimore County Fraternal Order of Police that the Baltimore County Police Department has about 225 vacancies. Around the State, similar record-breaking vacancies can be observed at many police departments.

There was an article published in the Baltimore Sun last year that U. S. District Court Judge James K. Bredar, who was 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've learned 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 380 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 training requirements for police officers, recruitment techniques being used, the criteria being used for promotion and the impact of current State and local laws on policing and police departments. Of course, the work group is also charged with examining the current salary ranges, health benefits and retirement benefits for police officers statewide. Thanks to Senator Smith's amendment, the work group will take a look at the migration of police officers between departments, the attrition rates of newly certified police officers and the average length of active service for police officers. Finally, the work group will make recommendations to the General Assembly of measures that should be adopted to reverse the decline in police retention statewide.

Senate Bill 380 does its best to establish a truly balanced workgroup. It includes a State Senator, a Delegate, the Secretary of the Department of State Police, the Attorney General, the Public Defender, the President of the Maryland State's Attorneys Association, the President of the Maryland Chiefs of Police Association, a representative of the NAACP, a representative of the Fraternal Order of Police 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 policies that empower our institutions of public safety to protect us in a legal and professional manner. Senate Bill 380 will better inform us on how to do so.

I appreciate the Committee's consideration of Senate Bill 380 and will be more than happy to answer any follow-up questions the Committee may have.