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Testimony before the Senate Committee on Labor and Regulatory Reform

Senator André Jacque

February 17, 2022

Chair Nass and Members of the Senate Committee on Labor and Regulatory Reform,

Thank you for holding this hearing and the opportunity to testify before you in support of Senate Bill 849 and Assembly Bill 831, which creates a law enforcement recruitment and retention marketing campaign.

Wisconsin, like the rest of the nation, is seeing a significant increase in crime. Unfortunately, as crime is on the rise, the number of officers on our streets is at the lowest level in at least a decade. Senate Bill 849 and Assembly Bill 831 aims to reverse this trend through investments in recruitment of new law enforcement officers to the State of Wisconsin.

I have heard from many law enforcement officers over the past few years about how they no longer feel like their profession is one they can recommend to their children. A December Chief of Police Survey identified a lack of community support as one reason why law enforcement departments have struggled to recruit and retain officers. This lack of support is seen in communities across the country as they seek to reduce funding for law enforcement. Minneapolis recently considered a ballot question to do just this. While it was defeated, proposals like these send a strong message to law enforcement.

Senate Bill 849 Assembly Bill 831 would dedicate \$1 million of ARPA funds to a “Pro-Cop Wisconsin” marketing campaign to recruit new officers within Wisconsin and attract officers from outside the state in communities that have sought to reduce support for law enforcement. The Wisconsin Department of Justice and the WEDC will be required to work with local law enforcement agencies to develop the campaign.

This legislation can fill a vital role to address our present and future law enforcement workforce needs and send a strong message that Wisconsin supports those dedicated public servants who put their life on the line to protect us each and every day.

SB 849 and AB 831 are supported by the Wisconsin Chiefs of Police Association and the Wisconsin Lodge of the Fraternal Order of Police.

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 849 and Assembly Bill 831.



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Testimony before the Senate Committee on Labor and Regulatory Reform

AB 831/SB 849

February 16, 2022

Thank you Chair Nass and members of the Senate Committee on Labor and Regulatory Reform for holding this hearing on AB 831/SB 849 relating to: a law enforcement marketing campaign. As explained by the Legislative Reference Bureau, this Bill requires the Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation (WEDC) and the Department of Justice (DOJ) to collaborate, develop, and implement the “Pro-Cop Wisconsin Campaign.” Additionally, the WEDC and DOJ are required to consult with local law enforcement agencies and associations for purposes of the campaign.

This Bill has become necessary as Wisconsin struggles to recruit and retain law enforcement officers, which has led to the fewest number of officers in a decade across the state. By utilizing \$1 million in federal American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds this Bill effectively markets Wisconsin to new law enforcement officers. An increase in recruits will assist local governments across the state who are struggling to fill vacant positions.

I appreciate your consideration of this Bill and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.



Wisconsin State Lodge *Fraternal Order of Police*



PO Box 206 West Bend, WI 53095

Ryan Windorff
President

Shane Wrucke
Secretary

February 17, 2022

Wisconsin Fraternal Order of Police Testimony in Support of Senate Bills 679, 848, 849

Senate Committee on Labor and Regulatory Reform

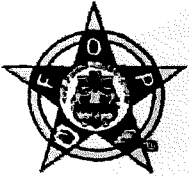
Thank you, Senator Nass and fellow committee members for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bills 679, 848, and 849. My name is Mark Sette and I am the Vice President of the Wisconsin Fraternal Order of Police. The Fraternal Order of Police is the world's largest organization of sworn law enforcement officers, with more than 364,000 members in more than 2,100 lodges. The Wisconsin State Lodge is made up of more than 2,600 members in 23 lodges throughout the state. We are committed to improving the working conditions of law enforcement officers and the safety of those we serve through education, legislation, information, community involvement, and employee representation.

Law enforcement is an incredibly difficult and dangerous profession and today officers are under more stress than ever before. High exposure to repeated stress and trauma leaves officers at a higher risk of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, cardiovascular disease, and addiction. Numerous studies indicate that law enforcement officers have a higher rate of suicide than many other professions. We know that many officers are dealing with the emotional and physical impacts of their duties, but the actual rates of suicide are difficult to determine as there is no centralized repository of this data.

Since January 2016, the nonprofit organization Blue H.E.L.P. has been compiling a list of first responders lost to suicide. These numbers are the best data we have but are compiled from publicly available information, so they are not a true representation of the problem. According to Blue H.E.L.P. 768 law enforcement officers have died by suicide since 2016, including 17 right here in Wisconsin. Officers are the most valuable resource law enforcement agencies have and we need to make every effort to ensure that they stay healthy both physically and mentally.

Senate Bill 679 would establish a training curriculum designed to prevent suicide in the law enforcement profession. There is currently no standardized training for officers to identify the causes, behaviors, warning signs, or risk factors associated with law enforcement suicide. This training would further identify intervention strategies to efficiently prevent suicide including crisis intervention and counseling services available to officers. This type of training has been used effectively and shown positive results in first responders across the country and is even taught in the United States military.

Senate Bill 679 would also require the Department of Justice to collect data on officer suicides in Wisconsin so we can better understand the true scope of the problem and tailor our response in the most effective way possible. This legislation will save lives and show that Wisconsin values their law enforcement officers and is willing to make an investment in them.



Wisconsin State Lodge *Fraternal Order of Police*



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Secretary

The law enforcement profession in many areas of our country, including Wisconsin, is at a tipping point. We are seeing record numbers of officers retiring at the first opportunity they can, officers resigning prior to retirement to enter the private sector, and the lowest number of new officers entering the profession in a decade. There are many reasons for these trends, not the least of which is the erosion of respect for law enforcement coupled with public figures promoting anti-police rhetoric and efforts to defund departments. Additionally, the starting salaries of law enforcement officers often does not reflect the increasing educational qualifications we demand of our officers. All of this with the recognition that law enforcement is an increasingly dangerous profession. This past year, violence directed at law enforcement officers surged. In 2021, 346 officers were shot in the line of duty, 63 of whom were killed by gunfire. There were 103 ambush-style attacks on law enforcement officers last year, which was an increase of 115% from 2020, and resulted in 130 officers being shot. Thirty of those officers were killed.

Senate Bill 848 would require the Law Enforcement Standards Board to reimburse costs associated with preparatory training that were paid by an individual going into the law enforcement profession. As we struggle to recruit officers in our state, we need to recognize that there is a large pool of qualified candidates that are ready and willing to serve but may not have the financial means to pursue the career on their own. The law enforcement academy is a full time 720-hour commitment. Individuals who are not employed by a law enforcement agency not only have to pay for the tuition of this training but must continue to pay for their living expenses during that time. The reimbursement that this bill would provide would allow for a new pool of quality candidates to enter the profession that may have been previously prohibited by cost. The bill would additionally increase reimbursements to agencies to cover increasing costs associated with annual recertification of officers.

Senate Bill 849 would require the implementation of a "Pro-Cop Wisconsin Campaign" designed to recruit law enforcement officers to and retain law enforcement officers in Wisconsin. We know through our work that despite what is being presented in the media that most of the good law-abiding citizens in Wisconsin support law enforcement officers. We need to get that message out to citizens of Wisconsin young and old, existing Wisconsin officers, and out of state officers that Wisconsin values their law enforcement officers and is willing to make an investment in them. This will make great strides in correcting the recruitment and retention issues we are experiencing.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of these bills, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.