

I've wanted to be a police officer all my life and it runs in my bloodline. My grandfather was a Captain, my great uncle was a Chief and two of my uncles were Sergeants. They were my role models. I saw the uniform they wore as a symbol of courage and honor. I grew up respecting and appreciating the individuals that wore that uniform and they always represented pride, trust, accountability and protection. And now I have the same honor of wearing that uniform as many of my family members did before me, although based on the current climate I'm sure they all wish I chose a safer profession.

Law enforcement has changed drastically over the years and I am frightened of the future of this generation's officers. Growing up, myself and my friends always had the upmost respect for law enforcement officers and that simply isn't the case anymore. It is the norm for citizens to chant "Fuck the police", call an officer a "pig", spray paint "ACAB" (all cops are bastards) on monuments and proudly state that "the only good cop is a dead cop". Cops are being murdered and violently assaulted at an alarming rate and there is no public outcry. There are no protests being held. There is no justice being served and politicians and the general public don't seem to care. We go to work every single day to selflessly protect our communities and when we are murdered there is no outrage.

I do not stand behind the actions of the officers in Minneapolis. Those officers never deserved to wear the badge that they were given. There are no justifications for their actions. Every single cop I know feels the exact same way- what happened there was wrong and justice needs to be served. But we are not them and we shouldn't have to pay for their wrong doing. The cops I know are decent, compassionate human beings that got into this profession because they wanted to help people and add value to their communities. Some coach little league, mentor youth and volunteer at their churches in their spare time. The cops I know are also fathers, mothers and most importantly they are human beings. This bill, as it's currently written, is detrimental to our safety and our profession.

Recruitment and retention are already at an all-time low. With most towns no longer offering pensions to incoming officers it's even harder to get qualified applicants to join the police force. Removing qualified immunity will not only discourage top notch candidates from applying but it will also encourage seasoned officers to retire early, leaving police departments under staffed and over worked. We do not want to become an institution that lowers our hiring standards just to get a body in a uniform. We need to offer top of the line training and equipment to our officers so we can be the best resource for our community as possible. We need to strive to build strong ties with our community and rebuild whatever trust and faith has been lost. We as police officers should strive to be the role models to our communities' youth. And if you pass this bill that will not be possible because you will not have motivated, qualified, compassionate officers representing your communities – you will be left with officers that are so disheartened by the lack of support from their politicians that they have no other option but to find a new career path.

Two years ago I was at the legislature testifying for a bill to be passed that advocated for mental health and suicide prevention for first responders and now I sit here typing this testimony pleading with you not to rush this bill. This is not the time to vote on something as important as this. This should be tabled until the Covid crisis is over and we can have a public hearing. This needs to be a public discussion. Law enforcement officers deserve the opportunity to be heard on this. Law enforcement officers need to be a part of this conversation. Please do not push this bill through out of haste, fear or any other reason you may have. Please give us the opportunity to be heard.

