

Co-Chairs Manning and Bynum, Members of the Committee:

I speak individually as Mayor of Warrenton and not on behalf of my City Commission which has not had the chance to review this letter. I wish to support LC 746, and LC 751 entirely, and wish to support LC 748 in concept, but with a suggestion for improvement.

Background

For those that may be unfamiliar, Warrenton is among the fastest growing coastal cities and is located north of Seaside and west of Astoria. While considered a rural part of the coast, we are a mix of wild, rural country and dense, urban commercial areas. We also have one of the lowest permanent property tax rates in the region (\$1.67 per thousand AV). This means we have the 17th largest city in Oregon by square mileage, and barely any money to patrol it. We struggle to get positions funded, then the cost to train and equip it is even more a challenge. Our sergeant had to contend with driving a patrol car that required jumpstarting multiple times each day to run for over a year.

Turnover is high in our department be it lower wages and no upward mobility to disciplinary actions to which I cannot speak much about. This turnover causes a lot of fatigue when we have to burn through record numbers of overtime to ensure we have 24 hour coverage. In short, supporting systemic reforms such as Oregon's tax laws would be a start in helping address the limitations small departments have in affording training and ensuring enough officers are available to meet the needs of a community. I say all this because I do support police reform, but we need police and must be cognitive of the issues such as fatigue and lack of training funds to address broader issues which this committee is trying to address.

Support for LC 746 & LC 751

The injustice of how we hold our police officers in the state of Oregon accountable—and the often laughable dichotomies that result are not an urban issue—it's a statewide one.

I find it simply mind boggling that it can take close to a year for a city to separate officers who have committed misconduct, committed crimes, be a substance abuser, or have a pattern of inappropriate behavior, yet an officer with an otherwise stellar record can be separated within a matter of weeks for being upfront about using an expired ID to get a discount at a local store.

If Oregonians can be arrested for crimes, misconduct and substance abuse the same way across the state—why are police officers subject to different treatment for the same in different cities? I ask you the same as well. It is time that the state have a unified standard for discipline. It is time to make LC 746 reality.

Cities should be empowered to praise good officers, and weed out bad ones. Institutional protections such as unions are necessary to protect police from unfounded claims and in general to defend the practice of law enforcement. Like medicine, law enforcement can require snap judgments that have longstanding consequences and is always being

improved upon. But just as we have "equal treatment under the law" should we not have equal accountability under the law for those entrusted to compel the compliance of the public? Is that not better for both officers and the public?

Support for LC 748 Conceptually

I support the creation of a statewide database for police accountability. This will make it infinitely easier to see if a potential new hire is worth the investment of vetting and evaluating. It can cost quite a bit of time and resources to vet new hires, and this tool will help small departments more quickly vet candidates.

That said, I believe that whatever broad publishing of wrongdoing exists, if the officer is suspended and retained the record should reflect whatever, if any, trainings or actions were taken to remedy the situation for the future, and that remedy should be included under the same section as the suspension.

In short, if we're going to air a person's professional discipline record, that person deserves (specifically if the issue did not rise to termination) to have both the action and remedy related to being held accountable made public. Citizens should not be left with a singular impression of wrongdoing if actions were taken to improve future behavior vs. just simply punish. It is my experience that many times public records are a double edged sword in that they illuminate wrongs, but also fail to show the remedy in response to that, or hide such remediation in a remote corner of cyberspace. The goal should be to remove bad actors, and improve ones that need improvement.

Conclusion

I believe the legislative concepts referenced will help in the overall effort towards police reform. Regardless of what the Legislature does, though I do wish to remind the Committee that rural cities like Warrenton need assistance in providing more training and in equipping our officers. This would likely require meaningful property tax reform or the state providing funds.

Thank you,

Henry A. Balensifer III

Mayor Henry A. Balensifer III

City of Warrenton