

To the Joint Committee On Transparent Policing and Use of Force Reform -

My name is Sawyer. I am a homeowner in NE Portland, having spent my entire life as both a youth and adult in the cities of Gresham, Sandy, and Portland. I am deeply invested in my local community, and proud of the work my peers have put in towards meaningful justice - both racial and economic.

I write today in full support of the proposed bills aiming towards increasing police accountability. While much of my life I have not been particularly active or aware politically, I have spent a great deal of time the past eight years working to make up this lack. I've learned many things, but one of them is this.

As a culture, we have gotten the police mixed up.

We do not exist to make their jobs easier. The law does not exist to make them efficient. Our constitutional Bill of Rights is overwhelmingly put together in a way that makes law enforcement more difficult. Why?

Liberty. The direct exercise of government power - particularly in the form of hands-on policing - is in direct conflict of liberty. While to a certain degree I agree this might be necessary, I feel that many of my fellow Americans have forgotten this.

The police serve the law and government, and the law and government serve the people. It is our absolute right to speak out against how law is enforced. When police fail the communities they're ostensibly intended to serve, it is our absolute right to demand accountability. When the police - as an individual or organization - abuse the awesome powers granted them, it is our absolute right to question those powers, and deny them if so abused. If the police must give up freedoms or powers to guard the liberty of the rest of us, so be it. They are employees, and if the job becomes too difficult, they can do as the rest of us and find another one.

Many options and ideas exist. A vocal group demands that police be abolished and law enforcement be reformed to more adequately address real community needs. Others demand that the resources police departments demand be redistributed to much the same purpose - towards programs more directly intended to help reduce houselessness, substance addiction, and other social ills - while reducing the role of police directly such that they only deal with serious criminal elements. Yet others simply demand reform and training, confident that those in blue can learn to use their power responsibly.

To be honest, I do not believe the latter is possible. Maybe for some individuals. But evidence is clear to me - most do not believe they have a problem worth considering. In truth, they vociferously defend the actions of their own regardless of the plain-face abuse of power and violence committed. This is not fertile grounds for internally driven change.

Instead, change must be mandated. Imposing change from the outside is certainly rarely the formula for success. But when the ideal options have failed, less-ideal options must be pursued. I suspect much more action will be required. We must start somewhere.

To this end, I support LC 742, LC 743, LC 762, and LC 763 as a start to reforming and holding police accountable for their powers in Oregon. It is only a start. I wish for more. But I will take a start.

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-Sawyer Norquist