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OREGON STATE SHERIFFS' ASSOCIATION
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To: Members of the Senate Committee on Judiciary

From: Shane Nelson, Deschutes County Sheriff
Oregon State Sheriffs' Association &
Oregon Association Chiefs of Police

Date: February 14, 2023

Re: SB 779- Testimony Expressing Concerns – Law Enforcement Education Requirements for Hiring

Chair Prozanski and members of the committee,

For the record, my name is Shane Nelson, I serve as the Sheriff of Deschutes County, and I am here today on behalf of the Oregon State Sheriffs' Association (OSSA) and the Oregon Association Chiefs of Police (OACP) to express concerns with the provisions of SB 779.

Oregon's Sheriffs and Police Chiefs are committed to recruiting and hiring individuals based on comprehensive background checks and high standards for candidate ethics, character and ability. Most, if not all Oregon law enforcement agencies are facing a staffing crisis due to unprecedented retirements, individuals leaving the law enforcement profession and dwindling candidate pools. We don't believe these challenges justify lowering standards for hiring. That being said, SB 779 would impose additional educational requirements for public safety hiring that would make a dire workforce crisis even worse than it already is, and have little to no effect on improving the profession.

As a matter of background, educational requirements for public safety positions are not a new concept. Many agencies who instituted post-secondary hiring requirements in the early 1990's have since dropped these requirements after failing to see any difference in the quality of candidates their agency was receiving. These agencies also noted that the number of applicants applying for these positions were much lower than agencies that didn't have these kinds of requirements. This is an important point to make as the fewer applicants an agency attracts, the more difficult it is to fill positions as many applicants do not pass the other portions of the hiring process. These portions include testing, interviews, a psychological evaluation, and a thorough background investigation.

One final point, having a higher level of education does not mean a person possesses a higher ethical standard, strong character, or is any better suited to the law enforcement profession. I'd like to share a few examples. Our office has had an individual with a PhD resign from their

position after policy violation allegations. After a personnel investigation into misconduct, we terminated the employment of an individual who had a Masters Degree. These individuals had higher education degrees yet that had no influence in making them more professional.

In closing, thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony today. Please understand that Oregon Sheriffs and Chiefs are aligned in finding public safety candidates who meet the highest of standards and can be trusted to provide community safety. We only want the best professionals serving our communities. Public servants who possess ethics, character, and ability are the key to professional law enforcement agencies. SB 779 will not help in these efforts and will only make a difficult recruitment and retention of public safety professionals more difficult. I would be happy to answer any questions the committee may have.