

Submitter:

Tonya Reed

On Behalf Of:

Committee:

House Committee On Judiciary

Measure, Appointment or Topic:

HB4138

I support HB 4138 requiring "law enforcement agencies to enact policies prohibiting the wearing of facial coverings by officers except in specified circumstances. Prohibits the wearing of facial coverings by law enforcement officers except in specified circumstances."

The risk of impersonating an "officer" by wearing a mask has increased greatly this year due to ICE/CBP's daily use. Residents cannot trust that a person wearing a mask and uniform is truly an officer. If a legitimate agent or officer feels compelled to wear a mask for anonymity, this may embolden them to act beyond their scope of practice. If an officer fears their identity may be exposed based on poor service or behavior during interactions with residents, they may not be suited to public service.

Additionally, the lines are now unclear as to who the local police are since ICE and CPB's uniforms often display "police" on their vests.

When residents interact with police, tensions are likely already higher than normal. Strengthening trust between officers and residents is essential. Ensuring officers' faces are unmasked and that their uniforms appropriately identify who they work for can prevent unnecessary fear, intimidation, and escalation.

Thank you for considering my testimony.