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*Testimony before the Senate Committee on Labor and Regulatory Reform
Senator André Jacque
February 17, 2022*

Chair Nass and Members of the Senate Committee on Labor and Regulatory Reform,

Thank you for holding a hearing on Senate Bill 848 and Assembly Bill 832, a proposal that increases law enforcement training reimbursement. This legislation is supported by the Wisconsin Chiefs of Police Association and the Wisconsin Lodge of the Fraternal Order of Police.

To become a law enforcement officer, recruits must complete a series of academic training requirements including 60 college credits and a required 720 hours of police academy. In addition, officers must complete 24 hours of re-certification training each year. Under current law, the state reimburses the cost of police academy if a recruit receives an offer of employment with an agency. This bill would use ARPA funds to reimburse the cost of police academy for all recruits, regardless of employment status with an agency.

Current law also requires the state to reimburse a political subdivision \$160 per officer for recertification training. Obviously, this amount does not cover the cost of 24 hours of instruction, requiring the law enforcement agency to cover the remaining cost. While recertification costs vary by department, expenses can exceed \$600 per officer. This bill would require ARPA funds be used to double the reimbursement amount for recertification training to \$320 per officer.

Training reimbursements are paid from the penalty surcharge fund, however, this fund has recently been operating in deficit causing a delay in payments to local departments. This bill will require ARPA funds be used to ensure adequate funding is available to provide full and timely reimbursements for law enforcement training.

Thank you for your consideration of Senate Bill 848 and Assembly Bill 832.



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Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 848 *Senate Committee on Labor & Regulatory Reform* February 17, 2022

Members of the committee, thank you for holding a public hearing on Senate Bill (SB) 848. I'm proud to bring forth legislation that supports our law enforcement throughout the state.

Today, Wisconsin has the lowest number of law enforcement officers working in at least a decade. Resignations are up; applications are down. If we care about our communities and our constituents who live there, something needs to be done and it needs to be done now.

SB 848, before you today, assists police departments across the state with recruitment and retention by aiding them with the costs associated with hiring new officers and recertifying existing ones. Currently, a police recruit must complete a series of academic training requirements, including 60 college credits and a required 720 hours of police academy. Additionally, they must undergo 24 hours of re-certification each year. The state reimburses the cost of police academy, if a recruit receives an offer of employment with an agency. Under our proposal, funds from the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) would be used to reimburse the cost of police academy for all recruits, regardless of employment status with an agency.

Also, under state law, the state is required to reimburse a political subdivision \$160/officer for recertification training, which does not cover the cost of 24 hours of instruction. This means the law enforcement agency covers the remaining cost. While recertification costs vary by department, expenses can exceed \$600/officer. Our proposal would help departments cover the burdensome expense by using ARPA funds to double the reimbursement amount for the recertification training to \$320/officer.

Thank you again for allowing me to testify in support of SB 848. I hope to see your support on this important legislation.



Wisconsin State Lodge *Fraternal Order of Police*



PO Box 206 West Bend, WI 53095

Ryan Windorff
President

Shane Wrucke
Secretary

February 17, 2022

Wisconsin Fraternal Order of Police Testimony in Support of Senate Bills 679, 848, 849

Senate Committee on Labor and Regulatory Reform

Thank you, Senator Nass and fellow committee members for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of Senate Bills 679, 848, and 849. My name is Mark Sette and I am the Vice President of the Wisconsin Fraternal Order of Police. The Fraternal Order of Police is the world's largest organization of sworn law enforcement officers, with more than 364,000 members in more than 2,100 lodges. The Wisconsin State Lodge is made up of more than 2,600 members in 23 lodges throughout the state. We are committed to improving the working conditions of law enforcement officers and the safety of those we serve through education, legislation, information, community involvement, and employee representation.

Law enforcement is an incredibly difficult and dangerous profession and today officers are under more stress than ever before. High exposure to repeated stress and trauma leaves officers at a higher risk of post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, anxiety, cardiovascular disease, and addiction. Numerous studies indicate that law enforcement officers have a higher rate of suicide than many other professions. We know that many officers are dealing with the emotional and physical impacts of their duties, but the actual rates of suicide are difficult to determine as there is no centralized repository of this data.

Since January 2016, the nonprofit organization Blue H.E.L.P. has been compiling a list of first responders lost to suicide. These numbers are the best data we have but are compiled from publicly available information, so they are not a true representation of the problem. According to Blue H.E.L.P. 768 law enforcement officers have died by suicide since 2016, including 17 right here in Wisconsin. Officers are the most valuable resource law enforcement agencies have and we need to make every effort to ensure that they stay healthy both physically and mentally.

Senate Bill 679 would establish a training curriculum designed to prevent suicide in the law enforcement profession. There is currently no standardized training for officers to identify the causes, behaviors, warning signs, or risk factors associated with law enforcement suicide. This training would further identify intervention strategies to efficiently prevent suicide including crisis intervention and counseling services available to officers. This type of training has been used effectively and shown positive results in first responders across the country and is even taught in the United States military.

Senate Bill 679 would also require the Department of Justice to collect data on officer suicides in Wisconsin so we can better understand the true scope of the problem and tailor our response in the most effective way possible. This legislation will save lives and show that Wisconsin values their law enforcement officers and is willing to make an investment in them.



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The law enforcement profession in many areas of our country, including Wisconsin, is at a tipping point. We are seeing record numbers of officers retiring at the first opportunity they can, officers resigning prior to retirement to enter the private sector, and the lowest number of new officers entering the profession in a decade. There are many reasons for these trends, not the least of which is the erosion of respect for law enforcement coupled with public figures promoting anti-police rhetoric and efforts to defund departments. Additionally, the starting salaries of law enforcement officers often does not reflect the increasing educational qualifications we demand of our officers. All of this with the recognition that law enforcement is an increasingly dangerous profession. This past year, violence directed at law enforcement officers surged. In 2021, 346 officers were shot in the line of duty, 63 of whom were killed by gunfire. There were 103 ambush-style attacks on law enforcement officers last year, which was an increase of 115% from 2020, and resulted in 130 officers being shot. Thirty of those officers were killed.

Senate Bill 848 would require the Law Enforcement Standards Board to reimburse costs associated with preparatory training that were paid by an individual going into the law enforcement profession. As we struggle to recruit officers in our state, we need to recognize that there is a large pool of qualified candidates that are ready and willing to serve but may not have the financial means to pursue the career on their own. The law enforcement academy is a full time 720-hour commitment. Individuals who are not employed by a law enforcement agency not only have to pay for the tuition of this training but must continue to pay for their living expenses during that time. The reimbursement that this bill would provide would allow for a new pool of quality candidates to enter the profession that may have been previously prohibited by cost. The bill would additionally increase reimbursements to agencies to cover increasing costs associated with annual recertification of officers.

Senate Bill 849 would require the implementation of a "Pro-Cop Wisconsin Campaign" designed to recruit law enforcement officers to and retain law enforcement officers in Wisconsin. We know through our work that despite what is being presented in the media that most of the good law-abiding citizens in Wisconsin support law enforcement officers. We need to get that message out to citizens of Wisconsin young and old, existing Wisconsin officers, and out of state officers that Wisconsin values their law enforcement officers and is willing to make an investment in them. This will make great strides in correcting the recruitment and retention issues we are experiencing.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify in support of these bills, and I am happy to answer any questions you may have.