

Testimony for Senate Government Operations
March 17th, 2023

Good afternoon, Madame Chair, members of the Committee on Government Operations, and Olivia:

The Vermont Sheriff's Association is committed to meaningful reforms that address systemic problems related to sheriffs. We appreciate the committee's desire to address these issues acknowledging with crossover looming, we've run out of time.

We warn the committee, if passed, the changes sought in this legislation will create harmful unintended consequences by making changes to the system before it studies it. This legislation has the ability to affect employment, retention, and utilization of personnel by sheriffs; to shift burdens onto already stressed organizations in the Agency of Human Services, Buildings & General Services, the State Police, and municipalities; to impair sheriffs' abilities to pay financial obligations while compelling sheriffs to incur costs. S.17 continues the General Assembly's prior practice to not provide adequate systems or funding for sheriffs' departments. It seeks improvement through rescission that creates unrealistic expectations with unfunded mandates. It is missing the opportunity to fix the actual underlying problems where sheriffs are "neither fish, nor fowl."

We acknowledge and support the collaboration between the Vermont Judiciary and the Vermont Sheriff's Association to provide meaningful improvements to the safety and security of courthouses. While we don't consider our work done, the language we've mutually developed is a meaningful improvement that funds sheriffs' deputies in courthouses. We remain committed to future efforts with the Judiciary regarding deputies assigned to courthouse security and policing.

In closing, the Vermont Sheriff's Association will continue its efforts regarding continuous improvements of sheriffs and their departments. We endorse efforts to support victims, clarify responsibilities of sheriffs, ensure the financial integrity of departments, improve accountability, and reform how sheriffs are compensated. The Vermont Sheriff's Association believes the General Assembly should invest in our government institutions to improve them. We recommend that S.17 study these changes before executing them. We warn the committee that this legislation, as written, will cause harm to an extent we cannot even forecast. We encourage the committee to vote "no" on this bill and we'll pledge to continue work with the committee to support meaningful improvements to the institution of sheriffs.

Respectfully submitted,

Sheriff Mark Anderson, President
Vermont Sheriff's Association

