

March 30, 2015

To Chair Sweaney & Committee Members of the House Committee on Government Operations:

This is in regard to Bill H.8. Since there is presently no state oversight of the transfer of military equipment to law enforcement agencies in Vermont, it seems obvious to me that there should be, since this kind of situation could become the foundation for a police state.

I and others feel that this bill should be strengthened with amendments that put limitations (and perhaps outright bans) on the kinds and amounts of weaponry which are really necessary for meeting the goals of community policing and public safety here in Vermont. It should also include, in order to have any teeth to it, an amendment that would give the Attorney General's office responsibility for developing strict criteria in determining and enforcing such limits.

You have undoubtedly heard the testimony of others citing the \$37 billion worth of supposedly "surplus" military weaponry and equipment given to our law enforcement agencies across the country by federal agencies for only the cost of shipping – military equipment such as assault weapons, humvees, MRAP vehicles, and I believe, even drones.

While I can understand police departments viewing "free" equipment as a bargain in case they find a use for it sometime, I believe that some of that equipment and weaponry is really over-the-top as far as meeting the needs of community policing in Vermont. I can see a need for the normal kind of policing, but this proliferation of weaponry is extreme and I view it with alarm. I think that if law enforcement agencies have unnecessary "advanced" weaponry and equipment, then the tendency is to use them whether the situation calls for it or not

It is my understanding that domestic police and the military serve two different purposes. The responsibility of law enforcement agencies is to protect and serve the citizenry within the borders of our country, which is far different than the responsibility of the nation's military.

Across the nation there has been a significant increase in S.W.A.T. teams, 80% of which are just used to deliver search warrants. These S.W.A.T. teams sometimes kick in the doors of homes and have sometimes created dangerous situations for the occupants. While that sort of thing may sometimes be called for in big cities, it is a military mindset sometimes referred to as militarism, that we certainly do not need here in Vermont by our domestic law enforcement agencies.

I urge you to move this bill out of committee so it can at least be debated on the floor this session. I feel this is a very real threat to our democracy and possibly to our personal safety as well. We do not want to become a police state here in Vermont.

Sincerely,

Nancy Rice

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