

Dear Senator Benning, Senator Kitchel, Representative Beck and Representative Campbell,

As the Chief of Police in St Johnsbury, Vt. I felt it was imperative to offer a local perspective as police executives, elected officials, and community members work to reform policing. I am not denying that there are areas that can be approved upon, but I hope we can take the time to find a unified solution that takes all concerns into account and moves forward with input from everyone. The major areas of concern are Use of Force policies, hiring practices, training and education, disciplinary procedures and body worn cameras.

I know there is public pressure to act immediately on these issues. I understand the anger generated by the callous acts of police officers sworn to protect and serve who display such blatant disregard for the sanctity of human life. I too am angry. They denigrate the profession, and in a moment, destroy any progress that has been made. I felt that anger with the rest of the country as I watched police officers ignore the pleas of George Floyd and I faced that anger first-hand on June 3rd when protesters arrived in St Johnsbury.

To the point of my email, I am concerned that in the haste to legislate policy the full impact may not be realized. Qualified immunity is a protection from civil liability as long as the officer acted within the confines of the law, policy and constitution. It does not prevent individuals from recovering damages from police officers who knowingly and intentionally violate an individual's constitutional rights. Qualified immunity is what allows police officers to act without hesitation and make split second decisions based on a perceived threat. It ensures that police officers acting in good faith, based on their understanding of the law and the totality of the circumstances at the time of the action will not later be found to be unconstitutional. Denial of this protection would greatly diminish the ability and willingness of officers to make these decisions. Hesitation or inaction due to fear of prosecution could cause loss of life to the officer or another.

This job is not easy. It has grown more difficult with time and law enforcement continues to rise to the challenge. They have been tasked with taking on more and more responsibility as funding is cut to social services and mental health services. Often times responding and having no clear cut avenue or resource to resolve the situation they are facing. They attend every training required of them to help in these situations, such as Crisis Intervention, Medical Health First Aid and deescalation techniques. But these are not solutions. They are not Social Services, they are not Mental Health professionals.

The rush to create legislation based on emotion is no more a good idea than writing an email before you've given yourself a chance to cool down and think logically. Lets work collectively to identify what is broken, find a solution that works for everyone and be the voice of reason.

I will end this by simply stating that most police officers are good people. But more often than not the focus is on those few bad ones. Let's find a way to weed them out and make it so they cannot be a part of this profession.

I served as a Security Policeman in the United States Air Force for 12 years. I was a Vermont State Trooper for 20 years, an Orange County Deputy for 5 years and I have been the Chief in St Johnsbury for almost three years. I have been in police work for 40 years. I like to consider myself one of the good ones. As are the many that are serving the citizens of this state currently.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

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