

Good afternoon,

My name is Joe Corrow. I serve as President of the Vermont Fraternal Order of Police State Lodge and represent 322 law enforcement officers across the State of Vermont. I have been a police officer with the Burlington Police Department for nearly twelve years. I spent my first nine years assigned to patrol, where I served as a Field Training Officer and continue to teach patrol procedures focused on officer safety tactics. I am currently assigned to the Detective Services Bureau and serve as a team leader on our Emergency Response Unit. I am also the immediate past president of the Burlington Police Officers Association, FOP Lodge 21. During my time in that role, I was involved in multiple critical incidents that were reviewed by the Attorney General's Office and assisted officers as they navigated that intense and difficult process. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on this issue.

I want to begin with accountability and transparency. Law enforcement officers are held to a high standard every day. We are expected to conduct thorough investigations and bring them to a timely conclusion. In my current assignment, even high profile cases are expected to move forward once all available evidence has been collected. With limited exceptions, such as long term narcotics investigations designed to build stronger prosecutions, most major crimes are investigated and resolved within a matter of months. We also have to recognize that cases submitted to the Attorney General's Office following a critical incident are complete investigative files. They are thoroughly vetted, supported by physical evidence, and typically involve cooperative witnesses and subjects.

The Major Crime Unit of the Vermont State Police consistently conducts professional and thorough investigations of critical incidents statewide. Historically, those investigations were submitted to the Attorney General's Office and resolved within a few months at the extreme. Prior to 2020, it was common to see officers either cleared for duty or formally charged within approximately 60 days. Today, officers across Vermont often wait close to a year for a decision. During that time, communication from the Attorney General's Office is minimal.

From the perspective of the law enforcement community, this creates the appearance of a double standard. Officers are expected to work efficiently, meet deadlines, and provide regular updates

in the course of their duties. Yet when their professional standing and potentially their entire future is at stake, they are frequently left without meaningful updates for extended periods of time. Accountability and transparency must apply consistently across the system.

There are practical consequences to these extended review timelines. Officers placed on administrative leave and later restricted duty do not receive the same level of training as full duty officers. While on leave, they receive none. In the years since 2020, community leaders have consistently called for better trained police officers. Prolonged review processes directly undermine that goal. Policing is a profession built on repetition, judgment, and experience. When officers are sidelined for extended periods, critical skills degrade. I see this personally when I step away from patrol assignments and then return; consistent immersion sharpens performance. The current process works against that principle.

Retention and recruitment are already significant challenges in this profession. We cannot afford policies or practices that drive experienced officers away or deter qualified individuals from entering the field. My department has lost officers during these prolonged waiting periods. Others will continue to leave if uncertainty and delay become the norm. Prospective officers see this reality. They also know they can go to a surrounding state, face a similar critical incident, and reasonably expect a far shorter timeline for resolution. That comparison matters. A lawful, split second decision made in a dangerous moment should not result in a year of professional limbo. That is not a sustainable model for maintaining a capable workforce.

There is also a critical human dimension that cannot be overlooked: officer wellness. In a lethal force incident, an officer responds to a rapidly evolving threat, makes a split second decision, and then immediately enters a process that is intense and isolating. They are removed from the scene, taken to a hospital, photographed, separated from their equipment, and transported home. Within days, they sit for a detailed interview with the Vermont State Police Major Crimes Unit. They are placed on administrative leave, barred from their workplace, and ultimately restricted from full duty until cleared by the Attorney General's Office.

That is only a partial description of the process. What follows is months of uncertainty. Even when an officer believes their actions were lawful and justified, they relive the incident

repeatedly, analyzing each second, questioning each decision, and waiting for an outcome that may alter not just their career or reputation, but the course of their entire life. The isolation is real. The psychological strain is significant. Extended uncertainty increases the risk of depression, substance misuse, and other unhealthy coping mechanisms.

We ask officers to confront violent and chaotic situations on behalf of the public. When those situations result in critical incidents, we owe them a process that is thorough, fair, transparent, and timely. Delays of this magnitude serve no one, not the officer, not the agency, and not the community.

If we are serious about accountability, professionalism, and public trust, then we must ensure that critical incident reviews are completed with both rigor and reasonable speed. Our officers deserve clarity. Our communities deserve confidence in the system. And the integrity of this profession depends on it.