

Good morning,

My name is Joe Corrow. I serve as President of the Vermont Fraternal Order of Police State Lodge, representing 336 law enforcement officers across Vermont. Our membership includes officers working in municipal police departments, sheriff's departments, and the Vermont State Police.

I have been 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 instruct patrol procedures focused on officer safety tactics. I currently serve in the Detective Services Bureau and as a team leader on our Emergency Response Unit. I am also the immediate past president of the Burlington Police Officers Association, where I assisted officers through multiple Attorney General reviewed critical incident investigations.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak on H.0171.

This bill establishes a process that relies on a group of law enforcement professionals to develop policy and guidelines related to officer-involved critical incidents, specifically officer involved shootings. That makes this fundamentally a question of structure and representation. Who is formally included in that process will determine whether the final framework is complete, credible, and durable.

I want to address terminology that was used during prior testimony before House Judiciary, where officers were referred to as "defendants" and individuals involved in these incidents were referred to as "victims."

That language raises concern, not because of intent, but because of what it suggests about the starting point of the review process. At the time an officer-involved critical incident is under investigation, all parties are subjects of a fact-finding process. No charging decision has been made, and no legal determination has been reached.

Referring to officers as defendants and others as victims at that stage risks creating the perception of pre-judgment before the investigation and review are complete.

In cases where an officer's use of force is ultimately determined to be lawful and justified, that officer was responding to a violent act or imminent threat. In that context, they are not a defendant in any meaningful sense, and may in fact be a victim of the underlying criminal conduct that led to the use of force.

The reason this matters here is because this bill places responsibility for shaping policy and process into the hands of a working group. The language and assumptions brought into that process will directly influence the final product.

This is exactly why the Vermont Fraternal Order of Police must have a formal seat at the table. We represent officers who have lived through these incidents and the review process that follows. That perspective is critical to ensuring that the policies developed are grounded in neutrality, accuracy, and the realities of the job.

Our request is straightforward. The Vermont Fraternal Order of Police must be included as a formal participant in that process. Not as an informal consultant, not as an optional stakeholder, but as a defined and permanent seat at the table when guidelines and procedures are developed.

The Vermont FOP represents a large portion of sworn law enforcement officers across the state and our membership is constantly growing. When policies govern the careers, responsibilities, and post-incident processes of the officers we represent, we must have a formal role in shaping them. That is a matter of completeness and legitimacy in the process.

This is not about replacing any existing voices or agencies. It is about ensuring the working group includes a full operational perspective from those who are directly impacted across municipal, sheriff, and state police functions.

Finally, when policy development is delegated to a group of law enforcement professionals, clarity on membership is essential. A process that governs the full scope of critical incident review must include both operational leadership and representatives from those directly subject to its outcomes. Without that balance, the system is incomplete.

Any final version of this bill should explicitly include the Vermont Fraternal Order of Police as part of the group working collaboratively to identify protocols and best practices for independent investigations of officer-involved critical incidents. That inclusion ensures the process reflects the operational realities and perspectives of the officers directly governed by these policies. This bill represents a strong step forward in establishing clear, consistent, and durable guidelines that will guide future officers, department leadership, the current and future Offices of the Attorney General, and the public.

Thank you for your time and consideration.



Joe Corrow

President, Vermont FOP State Lodge