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59th Assembly District



AB 89: PEACE (Peace Officers Education and Age Conditions for Employment) Act

SUMMARY

The PEACE Act increases minimum standards such that all new peace officers in California must be 21 years of age. This bill also requires the California Community Colleges (CCC), alongside advisors, to develop a framework for a modern policing degree program for peace officers in California.

BACKGROUND

California has a vested interest in reducing incidents of excessive force by law enforcement officers. Officers with a previous shooting record are more than 51% more likely to be engaged in a shooting than officers without a prior shooting history. (Kposowa, 2008). As such, to reduce use of force incidents, efforts must be made to prevent an officer's first use of excessive force.

Data shows that the majority of use of force incidents involving law enforcement are committed by a small group of officers, so called "high-rate" officers. In a 2012 study, 5.4% of officers were found to have been involved in 40% of the use of force incidents that year (Stroshine, 2012). The majority of these high-rate officers tend to be younger compared to low-rate officers. (Stroshine, 2012) (Kposowa, 2008)

This Legislature has previously supported legislation recognizing that brain development continues until an individual reaches their mid-20s. In particular, the areas of the brain designated as still developing until then include portions affecting judgement and decision-making (Sara B. Johnson, 2009) (Health, 2011). Raising the minimum age will allow for peace officer recruits to achieve more brain maturation before interacting in our communities and while addressing high-stakes situations. Also, raising the minimum age to 21 aligns with other law enforcement agencies, such as correctional and probation officers, as well as the legal age to possess a firearm.

Further, studies show that a college education reduces the likelihood of using excessive force significantly.

(Terrill, 2010). Officers with no more than a high school education were the recipients of 75% of all disciplinary actions (Johnson, 2006). College educated officers perform better in the academy, received higher supervisor performance evaluations, have fewer accidents and disciplinary problems, use force less often and miss fewer work days. (Aamodt, 2004)

Four states (Illinois, Nevada, New Jersey, and North Dakota) require a bachelor's degree as an educational requirement and 18 states require at least some college.

Between 2014 and 2018, only 7.8% of all California officers had a high school diploma or less. Further, as of June 2021, only 0.15% of all POST-certified peace officers were between the ages of 18 through 21, showcasing that increasing the education and age standards for officers would not significantly impact the available workforce.

THIS BILL

AB 89, first, increases the minimum standards to be a peace officer in California from 18 to 21 years of age by the time of appointment.

Also, this bill establishes an advisory board consisting of POST, law enforcement, CSUs, and community organizations to assist to the CCC to develop the modern policing degree program in a report to the Legislature. The comprehensive degree requirements will include courses in psychology, communications, history, ethnic studies, law, and others to develop critical thinking and emotional intelligence.

This report also requires the program recommendations to create a model for financial assistance programs for students of low-income and underrepresented backgrounds with access barriers to higher education who aim to enter the profession.

SUPPORT

Anti-Recidivism Coalition (Sponsor)
California Faculty Association (Sponsor)

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SBX Youth & Family Services
Service Employees International Union (SEIU CA)
Southeast Asia Resource Center
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