



CITY OF HOUSTON

Houston Police Department

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March 14, 2023



The Honorable Ryan Guillen
Chairman, Homeland Security & Public Safety Committee
P. O. Box 2910
Austin, Texas 78768

To the Members of the Homeland Security & Public Safety Committee:

On behalf of Chief Troy Finner and the Houston Police Department, thank you for allowing me to provide testimony to this esteemed legislative body. I appreciate the opportunity to provide our perspective regarding the effect of House Bill 1152 as a necessary response to the difficulty in recruiting future police professionals. HB 1152 seeks to allow legal permanent residents (LPRs) who were honorably discharged from the United States military to apply to become peace officers in Texas. Currently, applicants must be citizens. LPRs who serve on the front lines in the military are just as capable of serving on the front lines as an officer. HB 1152 will provide an employment opportunity for these veterans upon discharge, thereby increasing our recruiting pool, but will also help us build trust by diversifying to reflect the community we serve.

Police departments across Texas face significant challenges in the recruitment and retention of officers, for a variety of reasons. As we deal with these recruiting shortfalls, we are also cognizant of the need for a diverse workforce that reflects the changing demographic of our communities. HB 1152 would allow us to tap into a promising group of applicants to satisfy both of those needs by providing an avenue for these applicants to continue their service. Veterans, especially those who are foreign-born, can also bring needed diversity to police departments in culture and in language skills, which are extremely important to building trust. This is especially true in diverse communities like Houston.

Veterans tend to understand service to a greater cause and that sense of purpose should be fostered when they get home. They understand unit cohesion, have a servant's heart, and understand things like chain of command. There are many reasons why people do not want to become police officers in the current climate, so we should encourage those that do. Anyone eligible to defend the country



should be eligible to serve their communities by keeping the streets safe. HB 1152 will allow us to access a diverse, hardworking, and patriotic pool.

The law enforcement hiring process is incredibly selective and removing a citizenship requirement provides no guarantee that any LPRs will be hired. Because of the necessarily high standards, in many departments, upward of 80 percent of applicants for law enforcement officer positions are rejected. Removing a citizenship requirement is not a magic solution that will immediately fill all vacancies or diversify a police force, but it may help.

It is important to note that this change in law will not grant automatic approval to become an officer. LPR veterans will still be subject to the same, thorough background investigation that all HPD applicants go through. Also, although some have expressed concern about potentially opening the door to terrorism within law enforcement or a gateway to ideological infiltration, the fact is, the same could occur with US citizens. It is incumbent upon our recruiting process (background investigation, psychological exam, etc.) to flush any such problematic applicants out, regardless of citizenship status.

It is also worth noting that HB 1152 is an important step in the transformation of police departments. Over the years, requirements for being a police officer have changed. Gender, height, and race restrictions were removed as the focus shifted to an applicant's knowledge, skills, and ability to perform the job. Allowing LPR veterans to apply aligns with the evolution of qualifications and has already been adopted by a number of states including Tennessee, Illinois, and Colorado.

Thank you for the opportunity to address this important issue. I am also supportive of a provision to expand HB 1152 to all TCOLE licensees, as recruiting dispatchers and jailers is also challenging. This bill, and others such as HB 1076, can provide an opportunity to LPRs that will benefit departments and our communities, and I respectfully request your favorable consideration.

Sincerely,

s/ Jessica Anderson

Jessica Anderson
Commander

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