

Members of the House Republican Policy Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today.

My name is **Brett A. Forry**, and I have proudly served in law enforcement for nearly 26 years. I currently serve as the Chief of Police for the Bern Township Police Department in Berks County, where I have been employed for over two decades.

I appreciate the Committee's willingness to address what I believe is one of the most significant public safety challenges facing Pennsylvania, the ability to recruit, train, and retain qualified law enforcement officers.

The staffing crisis is no longer a future concern. It is here today.

Every police chief I speak with is competing for the same shrinking pool of applicants. Departments that once received hundreds of applications for a single opening now receive only a handful, and many applicants fail to meet the professional, educational, physical, or ethical standards expected of today's police officers.

At the same time, policing has become increasingly complex. Officers are expected to serve as law enforcement professionals, mental health responders, crisis negotiators, social workers, medical first responders, traffic safety experts, and community problem-solvers. These responsibilities continue to grow while staffing levels decline.

The end result is officers work more overtime, experience greater fatigue, and face increased stress. This affects morale, retention, family life, and ultimately public safety.

While there is no single solution, I believe there are several practical steps the Commonwealth can take.

First, invest in recruitment.

Pennsylvania should consider expanding financial incentives that encourage qualified individuals to enter the profession. Tuition assistance, academy scholarships, student loan repayment programs, relocation incentives, and tax credits for new officers could make law enforcement more competitive with private-sector careers that often offer higher salaries and less personal risk.

Many smaller municipal departments simply cannot compete financially with larger agencies.

Second, continue investing in officer wellness.

Officer wellness is no longer optional—it is essential.

Officers routinely experience trauma that most citizens will never encounter. Providing confidential mental health resources, peer support programs, resiliency training, and wellness initiatives helps officers remain healthy, effective, and committed to long-term careers.

Healthy officers provide better service to our communities.

Third, support training.

The expectations placed upon today's officers have never been greater.

Training must keep pace with evolving laws, technology, crisis intervention, de-escalation, officer safety, and investigative techniques. Unfortunately, smaller departments often struggle to absorb the financial costs associated with mandatory and specialized training while simultaneously maintaining adequate staffing levels.

State assistance for training and backfill costs would provide meaningful support.

Finally, we must restore respect for the profession.

The overwhelming majority of Pennsylvania law enforcement officers serve with integrity, professionalism, and compassion. Every day they protect communities, respond to emergencies, comfort victims, and make difficult decisions under extraordinary circumstances.

Young people considering this profession need to know that their communities and their elected leaders value public service and support those who wear the badge responsibly.

Public confidence and officer morale go hand in hand.

Despite these challenges, I remain optimistic.

Every day I work alongside dedicated officers who continue to answer the call to serve. They represent the very best of our communities.

With thoughtful policy, strategic investment, and continued partnership between state and local government, I believe Pennsylvania can strengthen its law enforcement workforce while maintaining the high standards our citizens deserve.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I appreciate the Committee's attention to this important issue and would be pleased to answer any questions.