

Esteemed members of the House Judiciary Committee:

5/23/2024

Thank you for your time today, and for giving us the opportunity to submit both written and verbal testimony on House bill 2024-H7570 regarding the sale and possession of firearm suppressors.

I want to bring to your attention the police officers of our SRU/ SWAT and other tactical teams throughout the State of Rhode Island, as well as our large contingent of police rifle team members. The above-listed officers train for hundreds of hours each year with their assigned rifles. Over the course of a year, officers will fire more than 3,000 rounds from their rifles to maintain training and proficiency. It is common during training that officers will fire their weapons near one another to simulate real world scenarios. As you may imagine, the decibel level can get quite loud, regardless of the hearing protection used by the officers. Hearing protection aids in lowering the decibels, however, it does not fully protect your hearing.

The recent police-involved incident with a violent armed subject on Denison Street in Providence will clearly and unequivocally show the need for suppressors. There were eighteen members of the Providence Police SRU team on scene, who were exposed to the direct adverse effect of their unsuppressed rifle fire while addressing an imminent threat of violence. Following this incident, six officers have suffered hearing loss related issues stemming from this exposure. All six officers have had to seek follow-up medical treatment for their condition. Some if not all these conditions are permanent, with at least one officer having to end his career as he can no longer be exposed to the sound of a firearm.

OSHA explains any exposure to sound greater than 140 decibels as creating a risk for irreparable hearing damage. The average level of decibels emitted by an unsuppressed firearm is between 140-165 decibels. In comparison, an ambulance siren emits 120 decibels, and chainsaws emit 110 decibels. Suppressors do not suppress all sound coming from a rifle; however, they reduce the noise coming from the discharge of a rifle by 25-35 decibels. Suppressors serve no purpose in changing the ballistics or lethality of a rifle; it simply brings the decibel level down to a level that will reduce the chance of permanent hearing loss.

It makes sense for us to support this legislation allowing the purchase and use of suppressors by police officers, as it is simply an additional safety step that can be taken to ensure the health of the officer and longevity of their career. Furthermore, it protects police departments against disability claims, which could potentially affect the departments manpower and cities liabilities from the legal costs of IOD and workers compensation claims filed by officers, as well as from lawsuits that may be filed by bystanders who may be exposed to the loud sounds from firearm discharge. Noise induced hearing loss is already an occupational hazard that police officers will continue to face, however we can and should enhance the officer's ability to mitigate this hazard and lessen the possibility of hearing loss. Hearing protection is essential, however an officer in an emergency oftentimes will not have the ability to stop and put hearing

protection on. Allowing the use of suppressors would be one additional step in mitigating the occupational hazard police officers face in both training to do their jobs and in performing their jobs.

We ask for your support regarding this important legislation. There are currently 42 states that have similar legislation permitting all their law-abiding citizens to own firearm suppressors. There are over 900,000 suppressors owned nationwide. The time has come for Rhode Island to allow suppressors for law enforcement officers.

We hope that Rhode Island would be the 43rd state, if for no other reason than to protect the health of our police officers as stated above. Rhode Island has some of the most highly trained and capable police officers in the country, and our officers throughout the state will benefit with the passage of this legislation.

We humbly ask for your consideration and passage of House bill 2024-H7570

Respectfully,
Providence FOP Lodge 3
Michael D Imondi
President