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Viewpoint: FOR

H-5220 Testimony in Support

February 25, 2025

Dear Chairman Representative Craven and Members of the House Judiciary Committee,

I write to support **House Bill 5220** introduced by Representatives Ajello, Morales, Cruz, Stewart, Felix, Batista, Biah, Knight, Alzate, and Diaz, amending the 2015 Comprehensive Community-Police Relationship Act (CCPRA). This bill would continue CCPRA's requirements, its innovative traffic data collection and research, and create an Advisory Committee for the Ofc of Highway Safety.

Though now retired and a private citizen, over two decades as director of a community nonprofit I collaborated with law enforcement in discussions that led to the 2015 CCPRA Act. Police and community leaders in those discussions supported the CCPRA's primary aim – to ensure bias free policing in our State.

Yet without the data and police and community collaboration that H-5220 provides, it will be very difficult to gauge Rhode Island's progress toward this goal of bias free policing.

I especially emphasize the importance of the new Advisory Committee H-5220 creates. Perhaps 15 years ago, the RI Office of Highway Safety's Traffic Stops Initiative created such an advisory group, and I was a community member. That group was integral to the traffic stops research development and review process. It was also crucial in building trust and improving relations at a time of great tension between police and community groups. (I am convinced that the relationships built through this and other similar collaborations were key in defusing tensions and keeping our State relatively peaceful as crises erupted across the country in recent years.) I remember this advisory group as largely collaborative and effective. Its discussions while difficult, were candid, educational and productive. I believe H-5220 can similarly promote a strong community voice and an equitable seat at the table, and help rebuild meaningful collaboration between police and community.

I also support H-5220's effort to streamline data collection and reporting. The bill provides for a technologically up-to-date, online portal that will allow police, the Advisory Committee, the General Assembly and the public to easily generate graphs and simple crosstabs analyses of the data. Today's technology ought to be available for viewers to allow them to understand CCPRA's often complex data. This could be a useful tool for the General Assembly in your future work.

The original 2015 CCPRA Act's data and other reporting requirements lapsed in 2020, with the final study covering 2019. There is not been similar data available for community to understand the State's progress in achieving bias free traffic stops. A few years ago, at the suggestion of the Judiciary Committee and bill sponsors, a police/community team met from June-December 2021 to negotiate an amended CCPRA bill. I felt the legislative staff who facilitated those meetings did a superb job of "hearing" each side and promoting compromise. The current bill H-5220 reflects the outcome of that process, and I believe it is a positive and effective compromise.

Today, a bill like H-5220 promoting bias free policing is more important than ever. The past CCPRA traffic studies showed continuing disparities over many years, that demonstrate the continuing need for this bill. I respectfully ask the Judiciary Committee to support and pas H-5220. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Toby Ayers, PhD