

Governor Baker files bill to implement police officer certification system

The Baker-Polito Administration today filed legislation to create a framework for certifying Massachusetts law enforcement officers, provide accountability, ensure that police departments in and outside Massachusetts have access to candidates' training and disciplinary records, and provide incentives for officers to pursue advanced training to better serve their communities.

"This bill will create a more modern, transparent and accountable system for law enforcement credentialing and training. It will provide police departments with the tools they need to build trust and strong relationships with every community across the Commonwealth—at a time when we need it most," said Governor Charlie Baker. "We are grateful for the Black and Latino Caucus' and Public Safety officials' collaboration on this bill, and look forward to working with the Legislature to get it passed."

The bill, entitled An Act to Improve Police Officer Standards and Accountability and to Improve Training, would for the first time require police officers in Massachusetts to be certified, and it would allow for decertification, suspension of certification, or reprimand in the event of certain misconduct. Toward this end, the bill would create the Police Officer Standards and Accreditation (POSA) Committee, which would be comprised of law enforcement and civilian representatives, at least half of whom would be required to be persons of color.

"Massachusetts is one of four states without a police certification process," said Lt. Governor Karyn Polito. "But

the high standards of training we require for our police departments give us a strong foundation on which to build one. This bill will allow police departments to make better-informed recruitment and hiring choices while improving accountability for all the communities we serve.”

The bill would charge the POA Committee with the responsibility of certifying all law enforcement officials in Massachusetts, including those from non-municipal departments serving transit agencies, colleges, and other entities. The bill would also require the Committee to create a database of certified officers, ensure that training and misconduct records are available to officers’ current and future employers, and develop a standardized background check for those seeking employment with a new police department. The background check would include a check of the POA database and the National Decertification Index.

“A comprehensive POA system will enhance accountability and apply consistent standards statewide,” said Secretary of Public Safety and Security Thomas A. Turco. “It will improve public safety and public trust for the men and women who serve, protect, and inspire our cities and towns.”

Finally, the Administration’s bill would provide incentives for law enforcement officers who pursue advanced training in relevant skills and specialties beyond the levels required of all police officers. Such training would include foreign languages, advanced domestic violence and sexual assault response, advanced de-escalation techniques, and other high-level proficiencies.