

**Testimony of Det. Cameron Parker, Fraternal Order of Police, PA State Lodge
Before Pennsylvania Senate Judiciary Committee and Appropriations Committee,
Subcommittee on Public Safety and Criminal Justice – May 22, 2017**

Good morning. My name is Cameron Parker. I am proud to serve as a Detective with the Lower Merion Township Police Department in Montgomery County, where I have worked for the last 17 years. Before my service in Lower Merion I worked as a Police Officer for 6 years in the City of Reading. For the last 6 years of my career I have worked in an investigatory capacity, with a particular emphasis on narcotics investigations.

I am also proud to be an active member of the Fraternal Order of Police, Pennsylvania State Lodge, which represents approximately 40,000 active and retired law enforcement officers and their families throughout the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. On behalf of the members of the Fraternal Order of Police and their families, I would like to extend my thanks to the members of this Joint Committee for your longstanding support of Pennsylvania's law enforcement officers.

In light of my experience in narcotics investigations, I have been asked to provide the police perspective of House Bill 741, which would restore and modernize the mandatory minimum sentencing requirements invalidated by our state Supreme Court in 2015. At that time, I was working as part of a drug investigation task force in Montgomery County. I can tell you from my experience that the removal of mandatory minimums significantly and negatively impacted our ability to conduct effective drug investigations in the field. That is not some theoretical argument. That is a fact, based on real-world experience

My experiences in the field also taught me a few very basic facts about Pennsylvania's illegal drug problem.

Pennsylvania's illegal drug problem is very real, and it is getting worse. Overdoses in Montgomery County have increased steadily over the past few years, and 2017 is shaping up to be another unfortunate record-setting year. Our experience is sadly shared by many counties across the Commonwealth.

We know that people overdosing on illegal drugs are getting them from drug dealers. Those drug dealers often carry guns and are involved in violent crime as part of their work. Drug dealers can't call 911 if they get ripped off as part of a drug sale. They enforce their own deals, using violence to protect their business and that violence frequently involves guns. Drugs and violent crime go hand in hand.

A large part of my work as a law enforcement officer in narcotics investigations is to take violent drug dealers off the streets, keep them off the streets, and to do as much as we possibly can to disrupt the flow of illegal drugs into our communities. Mandatory minimum sentences are a significant tool in this important work.

In my experience as a narcotics investigator, mandatory minimums were a major asset in conducting investigations, especially in leveraging offenders to move "up the chain" and assist with investigations into their suppliers. Since losing the threat posed by mandatory minimums in 2015, offenders have been less willing to cooperate and our investigations have become more difficult and less effective. The removal of mandatory minimums has made our job on the streets much harder, at a time when the threats we face seem more significant than ever. That's why the PA FOP is supporting House Bill 741.

We also think it is significant that Pennsylvania's mandatory-minimum sentencing system was not invalidated for any reason related to its effectiveness as part of our criminal justice system. In other words, it wasn't scrapped because it didn't work. Instead, the system was scrapped because the Supreme Court told us we couldn't use it unless and until the legislature made very minor and focused changes to Title 18.

HB 741 does exactly that. It provides the exact changes identified by the Supreme Court to protect constitutional rights, in addition to other improvements that are intended to place the focus of minimums on violent crimes and on drug crimes related to distribution as opposed to use. House Bill 741 precisely seeks to restore and update a sentencing system that in my experience has been effective in fighting crime and the import of drugs into our neighborhoods. Police officers in the field have been waiting for two years for the legislature to act. We respectfully request that this committee and body move this common-sense bill forward so we can do our jobs more effectively.

For the above reasons, the Fraternal Order of Police, Pennsylvania State Lodge, supports House Bill 741, and we ask the members of this Committee to move the bill forward.

Thank you for your consideration and support.