

February 1, 2023
House Appropriations Committee
HB 1307
Rep. Vigesaa, Chair

For the record, I am Stephanie Dassinger Engebretson. I am appearing on behalf of the Chiefs of Police Association of North Dakota. I am also the deputy director and attorney for the North Dakota League of Cities.

The Chiefs of Police appear today in support of HB 1307. This bill creates a back the blue grant program to support retention and recruitment efforts of local law enforcement. The Chiefs of Police support both the original bill and the amendments to the bill; however, the Chiefs believe that the amended bill will have a stronger impact on recruitment and retention efforts because it will get the money to police departments more quickly and ensures small departments with less resources can still access the funds. The elimination of an application also cuts down on the required administrative duties, causing less strain to already limited administrative resources.

As you have heard, local law enforcement is having a difficult time recruiting and retaining the right individuals to protect and serve our communities as law enforcement officers. Ms. Presky's survey on recruitment and retention of local law enforcement officers also included an open-ended question about asking sheriffs and police chiefs to "provide a narrative to describe the challenges your county / city is experiencing related to recruitment or retention of officers." A couple of the police chiefs' responses are very demonstrative about the issues local law enforcement is facing:

"The number of applicants is scary. It usually leads to starting over until we can find a qualified candidate. All of this costs money and puts stress on the rest of the staff."

"Only a 2 person department, requiring lots of on call time on top of work time. It doesn't take long for an officer to realize they can go somewhere else, make more money for less time invested to their job. There are safety issues too. We respond to serious calls with 1 to 2 officers whereas other departments have adequate back up to safely execute their duties."

HB 1307, with the amendments, would give local law enforcement extra resources to address these recruitment and retention issues. The bill, as amended, would also provide departments the flexibility to structure their efforts to their unique needs. The Chiefs of Police respectfully request adoption of the amendments and a "Do Pass" recommendation on HB 1307.