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STATEMENT ON S.2800 (1/2)

Voting NO on S. 2800 was a decision I did not take lightly. As always, I weigh important votes with intense scrutiny, deep thought, and in consultation with all stakeholders.

There are many provisions in S.2800 that I support, including amendments to ban chokeholds, facial recognition technology, tear gas, and chemical weapons, to collect racial disparity data on traffic stops, and end the automatic prosecution of teenagers as adults. I support the inclusion of many of the #8CantWait reforms. In addition, this bill creates an African American Commission and Latinx Commission which I support. These commissions will have statutory authority to review legislation, policy, and budgets through an equity lens to ensure that the actions we take in the Legislature have a positive impact on black and brown communities.

This bill, however, was not subject to public hearings, and as a result did not include several key provisions. We missed the opportunity to diversify police forces, allowing them to better reflect our communities, including by adding a three-year residency requirement in Boston, which the Mayor and Council have already approved. These amendments I offered were not included, and would have undoubtedly strengthened our community policing.

The qualified immunity language in the bill is problematic, because it will apply to all public employees and has the high likelihood of being used disproportionately against minority government employees in many sectors, not just policing. The Massachusetts Association of Minority Law Enforcement Officers (MAMLEO), Latino Law Enforcement Group of Boston (LLEGO), the Cape Verdean Police Officers Association (CVPA), Black Clergy in Boston, and many in the community across the 1st Suffolk District were clear: ‘we have to be consistent in rooting out disparities in outcomes.’

Furthermore, the Police Officer Standards and Accreditation Committee (POSAC) will be the change we need to root out unfit police officers for misconduct. Let me be clear: all criminal actions by those who swear an oath to protect and serve is reprehensible and must be addressed with real and definitive accountability.



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STATEMENT ON S.2800 (2/2)

The independent POSAC committee is a strong, transparent accountability measure that I wholeheartedly support. It would give victims the standing they need in court to hold unfit police officers accountable and pursue restitution for violations of their rights. With POSAC in place, we in Massachusetts are giving the public an essential and effective tool to protect against police misconduct and violence, without eliminating protections against frivolous lawsuits for all public employees.

I also felt it was necessary to express my discontent that groups which represent Black and Latino officers, who are disproportionately disciplined, and community-based organizations that have been fighting against racial injustice and inequality in our communities for decades were not at the table for these critical conversations. We must do better to be inclusive in policymaking in order to best serve and protect our communities.

Finally, the chairperson of the Black and Latino Caucus cautioned us to not stray from the core reforms outlined in their 10-point plan, and the qualified immunity provision, as written in S.2800, makes it difficult to get these reforms passed in the short time frame we are working under.

I'm hopeful that after hearings in the House a more thoroughly vetted bill will come back to us in the Senate. I look forward to voting for a package that brings about thoughtful and meaningful reform to address police misconduct, holds unfit police officers accountable, and addresses racial injustice in our Commonwealth.