



**EDITORIALIZE; ASK YOUR LEGISLATORS TO VOTE “NO” ON
POLICE SECRECY BILL, HOUSE BILL 27**

Summary of Bill: [HB 27](#) would prohibit the release of the identity of a law enforcement officer involved in "use of force" that results in serious injury or death. Under the proposal, unless criminal charges are filed, identity information may only be released if the officer consents, 30 days have passed, or after a completed official investigation. Even then, whether it is ever released publicly is completely within the discretion of the police department. In practical terms, this proposal could shield from public view the identity of the officers involved in almost all use of force incidents that result in serious injury or death. The names of police officers whose actions cause injury to citizens must be presumptively public, with appropriate protection when there are personal security concerns.

HB 27 was voted on second consideration in the House this week. If it passes a third consideration in the House, it will move to the Senate for consideration. This Bill is very similar to HB 1538 from last session, which was [vetoed](#) by Governor Wolf. **We ask that you please contact your legislators regarding this bill, and we encourage editorials on the topic. Please send any comments and/or editorials to Holly Lubart at hollyl@pa-news.org.**

- The PNA opposes House Bill 27, PN 350. The bill gives complete discretion to law enforcement on whether to release an officer's name, unless the officer is charged with a crime.
- As currently written, the bill provides that identity information "may" be released after 30 days, the officer consents, or an investigation is completed. Instead of "may," the presumption must be that the name "shall" be released, unless there is a reason for withholding it.
- Moreover, an automatic 30-day delay is arbitrary, and in many cases, unnecessary. If a 'blackout' period is necessary at all, we have urged legislators to shorten it to three days, which is consistent with the Philadelphia policy referenced [here](#). An automatic 30-day delay will interfere with police departments' ability to respond to tense situations rapidly unfolding in their communities, and some circumstances call for prompt information about the officer involved in a shooting. For example, in December 2015, Northern York Regional Police released dashcam video of an officer-involved shooting to help locate the suspect. The video and accompanying comments by the chief provided the officer's identity, as well as the suspect's. "I want the public

to know and understand that this is a dangerous man," Northern York County Regional Police Chief Mark Bentzel told the York Dispatch.

- Police officers serve critical roles in our communities. They also carry and use weapons that can dramatically change, or even end, a person's life, in an instant. When a person is injured by police action, it is important for community members to understand the circumstances surrounding the incident. The identity of an officer, as well as the accused, is a critical piece of this understanding. Police already wear name tags, are well-known in their communities, and are being recorded by citizens every day.
- Police departments across the country are moving toward - not away from - more transparency in police-involved, use-of-force incidents. Law enforcement agencies and citizen advocates have backed release of this information as a means to calm their communities, affirm their commitment to transparency, and assure community members that the criminal justice system is working, or will work, fairly and appropriately.
- The names of police officers whose actions cause injury to citizens must be presumptively public. The bill could be significantly improved with a few small changes that would continue to protect the important safety and security interests at stake.
- The bill could be significantly improved with a few small changes that would continue to protect the important safety and security interests at stake.

We urge Legislators to vote “No” on HB 27, as contrary to the public’s right to know and inconsistent with the best interests of both the public and law enforcement, or to amend the Bill to create the presumption of access and shorten any mandatory ‘blackout’ period.