



March 10, 2017

Dear House Members:

The Pennsylvania NewsMedia Association is the statewide trade association for print and online news media in Pennsylvania, and counts more than 300 print, digital and related media organizations as members. On behalf of PNA's members, we are writing to express our opposition to HB 27, which is scheduled for a vote in the House next week.

House Bill 27 would prohibit the release of the identity of a law enforcement officer involved in a "use of force" that results in serious injury or death. 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. The names of police officers' whose actions cause injury to citizens must be presumptively public, with appropriate protection where there are personal security concerns.

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 well-founded reason for withholding it. Moreover, an automatic 30-day delay is arbitrary, and in many cases, unnecessary. If a 'blackout' period is necessary, we urge you to shorten it to three days, which is consistent with the Philadelphia policy referenced here: <https://www.phillypolice.com/assets/directives/PPD-Directive-10.1.pdf>.

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 crucial 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. In fact, police departments across the country are moving toward more transparency in use-of-force incidents. Law enforcement agencies and citizen advocates have all 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.

We believe that, as written, this bill is contrary to the public's right to know and inconsistent with the best interests of both the public and law enforcement. As you know, Gov. Wolf vetoed an identical bill last session. We believe it could be significantly improved a few small changes that would continue to protect the important safety and security interests at stake.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of this issue, and we would welcome the opportunity to discuss it with you in more detail. Please contact me at 717-385-0900 or hollyl@pa-news.org if we can provide any additional information.

Sincerely,

Holly Lubart
Director of Government Affairs