



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 opposed 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, and even then, it can still be withheld. The names of police officers' whose actions cause injury to citizens must be presumptively public. We believe this bill is contrary to the public's right to know and inconsistent with the best interests of both the public and law enforcement.

The 30-day blackout period notes that identity information may be disclosed, but only in the discretion of the police where they determine that there is no reasonable expectation of harm, or upon the consent of the officer involved. In fact, the law makes it a crime to release this information prematurely. The bill gives complete discretion to law enforcement on whether to release an officer's name, unless the officer is charged with a crime. 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 will interfere with police departments' ability to respond to tense situations rapidly unfolding in their communities.

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.

Police departments across the country are moving toward more transparency in police-involved and use-of-force incidents. Law enforcement agencies and citizen advocates alike back 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.

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