



CAPITOL WEEKLY

COVERING CALIFORNIA GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

Public safety legislation: Read the fine print carefully

By: Brian Marvel, President of the Peace Officers Research Association of California (PORAC)

Public safety is one of the most important issues facing our state and our country right now – if our loved ones are not safe or do not feel safe, nothing else matters.

As members of our California communities call for reform, our state legislators have proposed almost two dozen bills aimed at fundamentally changing the practice of law enforcement in our state. Unfortunately, many of these bills were developed overnight, in silos and behind closed doors. They have not been vetted by criminal justice or public safety experts – leaving many of us in law enforcement quite concerned, as the impacts of these bills on public safety are largely unknown. This issue is far too important to approach haphazardly.

California has long been the state that breaks down barriers, leads the charge against the status quo and is accepting of new change.

While we support the spirit and intent of many of these proposed bills, the fine print matters – it could put our families and our officers at additional and unnecessary risk of harm.

California has always led the way in creating meaningful reforms to improve the practice of law enforcement – it is a charge that we must continue to lead. Time and again, we have looked at our policing practices and decided we can do better – and we can do it again if we give this issue the time, attention and careful scrutiny it deserves. Many in our communities are calling for change, and we cannot afford to get this one wrong – so let's work together to get it right.

With only a few shorts weeks left in a truncated legislative session, we urge our elected leaders to work together with leaders from California's law enforcement community to ensure we are working towards meaningful policies that will put our officers in a better position to serve our communities.

We want to work with our state legislators to provide our knowledge, experience and expertise about what works and what doesn't to put forward comprehensive solutions that have the greatest chance of success.

The **Peace Officers Research Association of California (PORAC)** recently released our **PORAC Policy Platform**, outlining our proactive recommendations to improve public safety outcomes that will help to repair the trust between law enforcement and those we serve.

We are calling for a comprehensive approach to addressing mental health, addiction, and homelessness in our state — one that improves public safety and doesn't require officers to serve as full-time mental health professionals or social workers.

We are calling for increased transparency, including the use of body worn cameras — so that everyone can see what we see in events of conflict.

We are calling for greater accountability to ensure our ranks are filled with only the best and brightest officers.

California has long been the state that breaks down barriers, leads the charge against the status quo and is accepting of new change. That was the case last year when we came together to take a comprehensive look at how we could reform our policies to minimize the use of force within the state.

PORAC spent over a year surveying best practices nationwide, collaborating and collecting input from legislators, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU), our state attorney general and a group of diverse experts and impacted stakeholders. It was through these collaborative efforts that the Governor signed **AB 392** and **SB 230** into law – the most comprehensive use of force changes in the nation. We have an opportunity to build on that progress, but only if we work together.

California's peace officers are part of our communities. We serve our communities at the direction of our elected leaders, who have sent us to ensure protests against our profession remain peaceful and to serve on the front lines of our state's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. We are working overtime and our departments are stretched thin. Our profession is under constant attack. Our dangerous job has become even more complicated and fraught with additional peril. But we continue to show up every day to serve and protect our neighbors.

While we completely understand and share the desire of our elected officials to improve community policing practices to better serve our communities, this rushed and haphazard approach to legislating the practice of law enforcement is dangerous and irresponsible. As our state legislators work to move these bills through the legislative process in the next few weeks, our overarching message to them is simple – tell us what you want from law enforcement, and then let's work together to find common ground that keeps our communities and peace officers safe. We're here to serve you.

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Editor's Note: Brian R. Marvel is the president of the Peace Officers Research Association of California (PORAC), which represents over 77,000 public safety members and more than 920 associations. It is the largest law enforcement organization in California and the largest statewide association in the nation.