May 12, 2017

Via Hand Delivery

Members
Missouri General Assembly
201 W Capitol Ave
Jefferson City, MO 65101

Re: Oppose Penalty Enhancement Provisions, S.B. 34/H.B. 302

Dear Member:

On behalf of the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc. (LDF), we write to strongly oppose the enhanced penalty provisions of S.B. 34 and H.B. 302, which heighten sentencing penalties for certain crimes committed against law enforcement officers. While proponents of these measures have argued they support police officers, the reality is that they undermine ongoing reform efforts aimed at improving policing in Missouri, erode trust between police and communities, and, as a result, actually undermine public safety goals while doing nothing to legitimately support police.

Rather than adopt statewide reforms aimed at helping Missouri’s police forces meet their obligations to ensure law enforcement is acting in a constitutional manner, the legislature is considering enhancing criminal penalties for certain crimes committed against law enforcement. While nobody advocates for or supports offenses against law enforcement, the reality is that for many Missourians of color this measure appears to be a response to the activism of grassroots protest movements that continue to advocate for fair and constitutional policing and feels like yet another attack on their communities. Further undermining police-community relations in this manner sows seeds of division, which ultimately threatens the safety of both officers and communities.

Deepening divisions between communities and law enforcement through penalty enhancements comes with no tangible benefit to law enforcement. No evidence has been presented supporting the proposition that these penalty enhancements have deterrence value or makes policing safer. Moreover, these measures do nothing to genuinely support officer safety and wellness: they do not reflect any recommendations advocated by public safety experts. These measures do not call for support services for police, de-escalation training, improved safety measures, increased supervision, or any of the other multiple measures available to Missouri’s police officers that are widely accepted.
as promoting officer safety.\textsuperscript{1} They also ignore the broad agreement of public safety experts that effective policing and cooperation with law enforcement begins with building trust and accountability with the communities they serve.\textsuperscript{2}

For the reasons summarized above, we urge you to oppose the penalty enhancements contained in S.B. 34 and H.B. 302. At a time when we need to foster healing between law enforcement and our communities, we should not enact legislation which not only does nothing to advance this, but could exacerbate already tense relations between law enforcement and the communities they are sworn to serve. More than ever, trust and balance must be restored to the relationship between Missouri’s police departments and the communities they serve.

Sincerely,

Todd A. Cox
Director of Policy


\textsuperscript{2} See \textit{id}. at 1-2, 9-30.