



Matthew Graham
Center for Policing Equity & Resident of St. Louis
Testimony Opposing House Bill 702
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My name is Matthew Graham and I am a resident of St. Louis. I am also here on behalf of the Center for Policing Equity, a nonprofit that gathers and analyzes data on behaviors within public safety systems and uses those data to help communities achieve safer policing outcomes. I urge you to vote against House Bill 702 which would remove local control of the St. Louis Metropolitan Police Department from the City of St. Louis and place it in the hands of the state. Eleven years ago I and my fellow Missourians voted to give control of our police to local leaders—I ask why the legislature is now trying to overturn the democratically expressed will of the people.

Misleadingly dubbed the "Safer St. Louis Act," the legislation comes in response to grassroots efforts to realign the city's public safety systems to meet community needs. The Center for Policing Equity (CPE) is proud to support community-led efforts in St. Louis that would reduce policing's harms, facilitate trust, and build public safety strategies that will deliver genuine safety, across the city.

Unfortunately this bill is part of an alarming trend to strip power from Black leaders in cities with significant or majority Black populations. History is riddled with similar efforts being made by primarily White power structures whenever Black people try to wrest control away from those power structures

The data speaks for itself for why this measure would be ineffective in fighting crime. Kansas City, the only Missouri department under state control, suffered its second-deadliest year in recorded history in 2022. When St. Louis was previously under state control prior to 2013, it did not improve crime rates. However, once under local control, while state crime levels were rising, the homicide rate in St. Louis fell and the decrease was maintained in 2022.¹

As written, the bill highlights problems both inside and outside of policing without stipulating how the new law would address them. Issues with recruitment and retention, for instance, aren't a product of the current city administration—they're nationwide problems that have not been solved by bigger budgets.

Retired Salt Lake City Police Chief Chris Burbank, who served as Vice President of the Major Cities Police Chief and is now with Center for Policing Equity, has written a letter explaining why HB 702 would undermine trust between government and the communities they serve, which has been submitted for the record. He explains that this bill ties the hands of the chief, destroys local accountability and siloes police from the larger public safety ecosystem which exists and is being built.

As a concerned citizen and representative from the Center for Policing Equity I urge you to oppose House Bill 702 and keep neighborhood safety in the hands of my fellow St. Louisans.

¹ Data Source: [Federal Bureau of Investigation - Crime in the U.S.](#), Useful Link: [St. Louis MO Murder/Homicide Rate 1999-2018](#)