

May 15, 2018

U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

RE: Coalition Opposition to H.R. 5698, the Protect and Serve Act of 2018

Dear Members of Congress:

On behalf of the 28 undersigned civil rights, civil liberties, faith-based, and government accountability organizations, we write to urge you to oppose H.R. 5698, the Protect and Serve Act of 2018, which creates a new crime for offenses that target law enforcement officers.

First, police already have substantial protections under federal and state law, rendering aw1001

Furthermore, the Protect and Serve Act does nothing to meaningfully improve officer safety and wellness if that is an intended policy goal. For example, it does not call for support services, better training, improved safety measures, increased supervision, or any of the other multiple measures available to law enforcement that are widely accepted as promoting officer safety and wellbeing.⁸

III. The Protect and Serve Act is polarizing and harms community-police relations.

This bill is being contemplated at a time when our country is in the throes of a national policing crisis, with a never-ending stream of police shootings of unarmed African Americans captured on video. Creating a new, yet superfluous, crime for offenses committed against law enforcement is a particularly disconnected and non-responsive policy choice. Unfortunately, the Protect and Serve Act is similar to other “Blue Lives Matter” type bills that create new criminal offenses and penalty enhancements for crimes against police.

Collectively, these policy efforts, which have sprung up amid the national call for police accountability, appear to be a political response to the powerful activism of grassroots movements that demand fair and constitutional policing. Rather than focusing on policies that address issues of police excessive force, biased policing, and other police practices that have failed these communities, the Protect and Serve Act’s aim is to further criminalize. This bill will be received as yet another attack on these communities and threatens to exacerbate what is already a discriminatory system of mass incarceration in this country. Continuing to undermine police-community relations in this manner sows seeds of division, which ultimately threatens public safety and undermines the work of law enforcement.

For the reasons summarized above, we urge you to vote against the Protect and Serve Act as it comes before the U.S. House of Representatives. There is no justification for creating a new crime for offenses committed against law enforcement. At a time when we need to foster healing between law enforcement and our communities, we should not be considering legislation which not only does nothing to advance the goal of officer safety, but will further erode the relationship between police and communities.

Thank you for your consideration of this matter. If you have

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Human Rights Watch
Government Information Watch
Law Enforcement Action Partnership
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
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NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, Inc.
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