

HB 593 -- PEACE OFFICER RESIDENCY REQUIREMENTS

SPONSOR: Portwood

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "do pass" by the Committee on Crime Prevention and Public Safety by a vote of 10 to 1.

This bill prohibits the Board of Police Commissioners in the City of St. Louis from requiring peace officers to reside within the city limits after the person has been employed for four consecutive years as a peace officer. The board may require officers to live within the state and may offer incentives to encourage them to live within the city, but may not discriminate against them based on their residency.

FISCAL NOTE: No impact on state funds in FY 2006, FY 2007, and FY 2008.

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that the main reason officers choose to leave the city is the lack of an appropriate public school for their children. The St. Louis Public School District is not even accredited at this time. Officers who stay within the city must send their children to private schools, which is a hardship for officers whose pay is inadequate. For those officers whose children have special needs, staying in the city is not an option. The Board of Police Commissioners says it has a waiver procedure established for officers with special needs children, but it is strongly suggested that you don't apply for that waiver. It costs the city about \$50,000 to train an officer, and many of them leave as soon as possible. This basically means the City of St. Louis is paying to train officers for other cities.

Testifying for the bill were Representative Portwood; St. Louis Police Leadership Association; and Missouri Fraternal Order of Police.

OPPOSERS: Those who oppose the bill say that this a local control issue and should be decided by the local entities involved. The Board of Police Commissioners was the body that enacted the current requirements, and it should be the body making any changes to it. The board has addressed this issue repeatedly and, along with the Mayor's Office, has chosen to keep the residency requirements in place. Peace officers are no different than other employees of the City of St. Louis. Every employee must live within the city. The argument that the city can't keep officers because of the residency requirement is not supported by the data. A very small percentage of police officers leaving the city cite the residency requirement as a reason for leaving.

Testifying against the bill were Representatives Johnson (61) and El-Amin; Office of the Mayor, City of St. Louis; St. Louis Board of Police Commissioners; Missouri Municipal League; and St. Louis City Police Officers' Association.

Richard Smreker, Senior Legislative Analyst