

Chris Burbank  
Center for Policing Equity  
Letter Opposing House Bill 702  
March 31, 2023

My name is Chris Burbank. I am the former Police Chief of Salt Lake City having spent nine years in that position. During that time, I also served as Vice President of the Major Cities Chiefs Association, an organization of the 70 largest cities in the United States and Canada. Additionally, I am past President of the FBI National Executive Institute Associates. Currently, I am with the Center for Policing Equity, a nonprofit, action, think tank utilizing scientific research to end racial disparities in policing.

As a longtime leader in law enforcement, I am deeply concerned about the attempt by some state senators, in Missouri, to take over local control of the St. Louis Police Department. It would not improve public safety, but rather undermine trust between government and communities. In addition, the bill would disenfranchise the voters who chose elected officials that share their vision of what is needed to improve public safety in the city they live in.

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 with 171 killings in 2022, which includes three fatal police shootings, becoming the third year in a row with staggering violence in the city. In 2020, the most homicides ever were recorded, with 182 lives lost. The next year was the third-deadliest year, with 157 killings in 2021.<sup>1</sup>

When St. Louis was previously under state control prior to 2013, it did not improve crime rates. Rather, the city was considered the most dangerous city in the country in 2006 and ranked second most dangerous on the eve of the switch to local control. The homicide rate in Missouri has increased every year since 2011. While the state levels were rising, the homicide rate in St. Louis fell 25 percent in 2021, bucking a national trend. This decrease was maintained in 2022.<sup>2</sup>

As a former police chief, I can say with confidence that this measure would impede the ability of the police chief to work collaboratively in a public safety ecosystem coordinated by one accountable, elected official. Rather than reporting solely to the Mayor, this bill ties the hands of the chief and routes accountability away from the community and places it in the hands of additional commissioners, appointed by the governor. This would make policing in St. Louis highly politicized and siloed from other public safety efforts designed to work in partnership with policing.

Throughout my career, I have consistently found that the people closest to any problem were the closest to the solution. Therefore, I do not have faith that this is an effort to improve community safety. Rather, loss of local control would diminish the relationship between law enforcement and the neighborhoods in St. Louis which they serve. I urge you not to move forward with this legislation.

<sup>1</sup> Data Source: [The Kansas City Star - 2022 was one of Kansas City's deadliest years. Leaders tout new plan, but will it work?](#)

<sup>2</sup> Data Source: [Federal Bureau of Investigation - Crime in the U.S.](#), Useful Link: [St. Louis MO Murder/Homicide Rate 1999-2018](#)