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Quinn Bill Reform Under Attack

Bill would increase costs but not improve police services

Four years after the state Board of Higher Education approved a strict set of academic guidelines for Quinn Bill benefits, a bill has been proposed that would expand Quinn Bill benefits to any legitimate college degree which would significantly increase state and municipal costs with no improvement in police services. Representative Martin Walsh of Dorchester (13th Suffolk) filed a bill (H2784) that would eliminate references to law enforcement or criminal justice degree programs, which would open up eligibility to any degree earned from a college or university in New England since the 1970's. Passage of this bill would be a step back in efforts to ensure that a well-educated police force is serving the public.

The Quinn Bill (Ch.41, s.108L) is a local-option salary benefit offered exclusively to uniformed police officers who earn a law enforcement, criminal justice or law degree. Police officers employed by a participating municipality are granted increases in base pay of:

- 10% for an Associate's Degree or 60 credits towards a Bachelor's Degree
- 20% for a Bachelor's Degree
- 25% for a Master's or Law Degree

This annual salary benefit is split evenly between state and municipality. However, overtime and pension costs that are increased by the higher salaries must be absorbed by the local community. Prior to 2003, no educational standards existed and educational programs most popular with police officers at

“diploma mills” were considered mediocre at best, producing little benefit to the public.

In calendar 2006, Boston's actual Quinn Bill expenses totaled \$18.6 million. Approximately 1,340 police officers receive Quinn Bill benefits or 59% of the total uniformed force. The average Quinn Bill payment for all eligible officers was \$13,887 in 2006.

Quinn Bill costs exceeded \$106 million for all eligible municipalities in fiscal 2007. Paying police officers a fixed percentage above the pay scale of their position over an entire career is an exceptionally generous benefit. Reforms still needed include:

- Replace the Quinn Bill with a new incentive program that progressively ties educational attainment to higher job responsibilities and compensation.
- Until then, change the Quinn Bill benefit to a fixed dollar amount for each degree rather than a percentage.
- Academic degrees eligible for Quinn Bill benefits should be expanded to include other specified disciplines such as sociology, computer science or public administration that can be useful in today's delivery of expanded police services. However, degrees should be earned within the last five years or prospectively to be eligible.
- Officers within five years of retirement should not be eligible for first-time Quinn Bill benefits.