



AWAKE ILLINOIS 2026 PUBLIC SAFETY LEGISLATIVE BRIEFING

RECOMMENDED POSITIONS TO STRENGTHEN LAW ENFORCEMENT
AND COMMUNITY PROTECTION

Prepared by Chief Tom Weitzel (Ret.), Fellow of Law Enforcement





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ABOUT US

AWAKE ILLINOIS IS A FEARLESS, UNCANCELLABLE GRASSROOTS MOVEMENT DEDICATED TO DEFENDING PARENTAL RIGHTS, RESTORING ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE AND TRANSPARENCY IN EDUCATION, PROTECTING CHILDREN'S INNOCENCE, AND ADVANCING CONSTITUTIONAL LIBERTIES ACROSS OUR STATE.

WE EMPOWER EVERYDAY ILLINOIS CITIZENS TO CONFRONT OVERREACHING "WOKE" POLICIES, GOVERNMENT OVERREACH, AND INSTITUTIONAL FAILURES, THAT UNDERMINE FAMILIES, COMMUNITIES, AND INDIVIDUAL FREEDOMS.

THROUGH RELENTLESS ADVOCACY, STRATEGIC ACTIVISM, LEGAL ACTION, AND COMMUNITY MOBILIZATION, WE FIGHT FOR TRUTH, EQUALITY UNDER THE LAW.

WE STAND UNAPOLOGETICALLY FOR LIBERTY, JUSTICE, AND COMMON SENSE IN A BLUE STATE THAT NEEDS AWAKENING—BECAUSE FREEDOM ISN'T GIVEN; IT'S DEFENDED.

AWAKE ILLINOIS FELLOWS ARE EXPERTS IN THEIR FIELD THAT OFFER REAL-WORLD INSIGHT INTO VARIOUS ADVOCACY AND POLICY ISSUES.

CHIEF TOM WEITZEL (RET.), AWAKE ILLINOIS LAW ENFORCEMENT FELLOW

CHIEF THOMAS WEITZEL (RET.) IS A 37-YEAR VETERAN OF LAW ENFORCEMENT, HAVING SERVED THE RIVERSIDE, ILLINOIS POLICE DEPARTMENT FROM 1984 UNTIL HIS RETIREMENT IN 2021, INCLUDING 13 YEARS AS CHIEF OF POLICE. RISING THROUGH EVERY RANK IN THE DEPARTMENT—FROM PATROL OFFICER TO DETECTIVE, SERGEANT, LIEUTENANT, DEPUTY CHIEF, AND CHIEF—HE HELD KEY ROLES SUCH AS FIELD TRAINING OFFICER, CRIME PREVENTION COORDINATOR, PUBLIC INFORMATION OFFICER, AND INTERNAL AFFAIRS SUPERVISOR.

AS FELLOW OF LAW ENFORCEMENT AT AWAKE ILLINOIS, HE CONTRIBUTES EXPERT ANALYSIS TO THE [AWAKE AND ARMED VIDEO PODCASTS](#) AND EXCLUSIVE OP-EDS ON THE [AWAKE ILLINOIS BLOG](#), GROUNDING DISCUSSIONS IN REAL-WORLD EXPERIENCE TO PROMOTE SAFER COMMUNITIES AND BETTER-SUPPORTED OFFICERS. HIS [SUBSTACK THE 'MEMO'](#) OFFERS THE PUBLIC HIS FAIR, FACT-BASED VIEW OF LAW ENFORCEMENT. FOLLOW HIM ON X [@CHIEFWEITZEL](#).



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EXECUTIVE PURPOSE

Illinois enters the 2026 legislative session facing unprecedented public safety challenges: severe police staffing shortages, declining applicant pools, operational strain on local departments, and statutory changes that have reduced operational clarity. Awake Illinois presents these recommendations to support law enforcement, restore stability, and ensure that public safety agencies have the tools necessary to protect every community in our state.



PRIORITIES FOR 2026

➔ RECRUITMENT & RETENTION

Illinois faces 40-70% declines in applicants and widespread vacancies. Legislation must expand—not restrict—the hiring pool.

➔ OPERATIONAL CLARITY

Departments require clear, workable statutes that support proactive policing and reduce legal ambiguity.

➔ TRAINING & TECHNOLOGY

Modern training, National Integrated Ballistic Information Network (NIBIN) expansion, and body-camera funding are essential for professionalism and investigative capacity.

➔ OFFICER SAFETY

Enhanced penalties for violence against police and improved tactical training directly support officer survival and community safety. Aggravated battery to police officer must be a detainable offense.



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LEGISLATIVE RECOMMENDATIONS

| Bill / Policy Area | Status / Topic | Position | Rationale |
|---|--|------------------------------------|--|
| SAFET Act (Pretrial Fairness Act) HB3653 | Eliminated cash bail | Enacted, Needs Modification | Judges need broader detention authority for repeat violent offenders and individuals posing clear public safety risks. |
| Clean Slate Act HB1836 | Automates the process of sealing eligible criminal records | Enacted, Needs Modification | Restore employer access for safety-sensitive positions and require judicial review before sealing records. |
| Public Safety Restoration Act SB2384 | Restores operational flexibility | Support | Corrects unintended consequences of prior reforms. |
| Police Recruitment Incentive Act HB1200 | Tuition reimbursement & loan forgiveness | Support | Addresses severe statewide recruitment shortages. |
| Police Lateral Transfer Incentive Act | Incentives for experienced officers | Enacted; Focus on Policy | Nearly half of Illinois hires are lateral; incentives strengthen retention and mobility. |
| Body Camera Funding Expansion HB1403 | Grants for cameras & storage | Support | Ensures mandate compliance without burdening local budgets. |
| Police Pension Stabilization Reform SB 1937 | Addresses pension pressures | Support | Essential for retention and long-term sustainability. |
| Police Training Modernization Act-HB1817 | Tactical & de-escalation training | Support | Enhances officer safety, professionalism, and public trust. |
| Restrictions on Hiring Former Federal Officers SB2820 | Limits eligibility (e.g., ICE) | Oppose | Shrinks the hiring pool during a statewide staffing crisis. |
| Crime Gun Intelligence Expansion (NIBIN) | Ballistics tracing | In Appropriations; Focus on Policy | Strengthens firearm crime investigations and interstate tracking. |
| Targeted Violence Against Police Act | Enhanced penalties | Support | Reinforces deterrence against attacks on officers. |



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DETAILED ANALYSIS OF CRITICAL LEGISLATION

1. Clean Slate Act – Public Safety and Employer Risk

The Clean Slate Act - already enacted into law - automatically seals broad categories of criminal records, limiting what employers, licensing bodies, and public safety agencies can review during background checks.

Key Concerns

- Reduces transparency for employers responsible for vulnerable populations
- Removes judicial discretion through automatic sealing
- Increases liability exposure for businesses and public institutions
- Conflicts with federal standards for safety-sensitive positions

Public Safety Impact

The Act restricts employers' ability to make fully informed hiring decisions, undermining workplace safety and public trust. For law enforcement agencies already facing severe staffing shortages, reduced vetting capability introduces significant operational risk.

➔ RECOMMENDED POSITION: MODIFY

Restore employer access for safety-sensitive positions and require judicial review before sealing records.

2. SB2820 – Restrictions on Hiring Former Federal Officers

SB2820-pending in IL Senate-would prohibit former federal law enforcement officers—specifically former ICE agents—from becoming police officers in Illinois. Bill sponsor State Legislator Laura Fine (D) in the 9th Senate District responded to Awake IL stating she “will not be withdrawing the bill and plan to continue advocating for its passage.” More than 2,000 emails have been sent to her through our website to oppose this bill.

Key Concerns

- Reduces the hiring pool during a statewide staffing crisis
- Excludes highly trained federal officers with valuable operational experience
- Imposes politically motivated restrictions unrelated to public safety needs
- Creates unequal treatment of qualified applicants based solely on prior federal assignment

Public Safety Impact

Illinois agencies report staffing shortages of up to 60% and a dramatic decline in new applicants. SB2820 would worsen this crisis by eliminating an entire category of experienced, vetted officers who could immediately strengthen local departments.

➔ RECOMMENDED POSITION: OPPOSE

SB2820 undermines recruitment efforts and weakens statewide public safety readiness. Submit the form at www.awakeil.com/fight to email the bill sponsor and committee.



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CONCLUSION

The 2026 legislative session offers a critical opportunity to stabilize Illinois policing through targeted reforms, recruitment incentives, and operational support.

This is Judge Teresa Molina-Gonzalez
She denied the prosecutor petition to detain Lawrence Reed
after his 72nd arrest.

She released him into the public
where he set an innocent woman on fire.

As Illinois continues to grapple with the ongoing impacts of the SAFE-T Act—particularly its restrictions on pretrial detention, reduced operational clarity for law enforcement, and challenges to public safety—Law Enforcement Fellow Chief Tom Weitzel (Ret.) and Awake Illinois will be intensifying advocacy efforts to see the bill amended.

Awake Illinois urges lawmakers to prioritize legislation that strengthens the law enforcement workforce, restores operational clarity, and ensures that agencies have the tools necessary to protect communities effectively.

Our team can be contacted at info@awakeil.com to discuss this report and/or to collaborate on any grassroots lobbying efforts.