

February 5, 2023

Members of the House Public Safety Finance and Policy Committee:

NAMI Minnesota has been involved in the POST Board's rulemaking process for almost three years on the Advisory Committee on POST Board Rules Overhaul. The advisory committee is a diverse group of law enforcement, educators, and advocates like us. We have been thoughtful and intentional in our work, and the advisory committee reached consensus on almost all of the recently proposed rule changes. As you will note, the administrative law judges (ALJs), who held hearings and reviewed the proposal, approved all but three sections of the draft – the most relevant to us is a minimum age of 18 for peace officers. We believe that 18 is too young, and along with many community members we outlined those concerns to the ALJs:

- The adolescent brain is not fully developed until at least age 25. Moreover, the specific parts of the brain that develop last are ones related to impulse control, emotional regulation, judgement, and considering risks and consequences. These are absolutely crucial skills for peace officers to be successful.
- Adolescents with more mature brains are better equipped to handle almost guaranteed exposures to trauma. Aside from the human cost, this arguably leads to a more sustainable workforce.
- The majority of states in the U.S. require people to be 21 to be a licensed officer.
- Many other professions around the country require people to be older than 18 to be licensed including bus drivers, EMTs, private detectives, general contractors, and social workers only to name a few.

While the ALJs did not make an affirmative recommendation on a minimum age, they did state that the POST Board did not supply sufficient evidence for why they chose 18. Last month, the board voted to drop the minimum age altogether, which means individual agencies may set their own minimum. We appreciate that the board seems willing to continue this conversation. However, we maintain that a safer and still reasonable age for patrol officers is at least 21, and we believe that the legislature has the authority to act on this important public safety issue. We understand the difficulties in recruiting officers right now. We have recommended that the board look at pathways for teenagers to commit to the profession but spend time gaining essential experience before being a patrol officer.

There is broad acknowledgment that some professions require more life experience and that is most often to the credit and quality of the profession. In Minnesota, we require staff in children's residential facilities to be 21 or older. There is a shared understanding that has been codified in law, that workers in a children's residential facility will be placed in difficult and crisis situations with our most vulnerable children. There are also policies and procedures in these facilities to prepare staff to respond to potentially violent or aggressive behaviors. Yet, it is hard to imagine extending that responsibility to an 18- or 19-year-old, let alone allowing the legal authority to take a life. Thank you for considering this important issue. We are happy to continue this conversation and work with this committee for public safety and wellness in all of our communities.

Sincerely,

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Executive Director

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