



Fraternal Order of Police  
Montgomery County Lodge 35

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**Testimony of Lee Holland, President of Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 35**

**OPPOSITION**

**Bill 34-21 – Mandating Vaccines for Montgomery County Employees**

On behalf of the 1500 active and retired members of Fraternal Order of Police Lodge 35, we oppose Bill 34-21.

Our opposition isn't from being anti-vaccine, as publicly stated by some councilmembers. Instead, we oppose this bill for several reasons: the potential impact to county services; the (again) repeal of collective bargaining rights; the overstepping of the Council's authority into the powers of the Executive; and, the overstepping of the Executive's authority as the employer.

It is no secret that the county has been plagued with recruitment and retention challenges within our police department over the last year. For example, we have lost some 40 sworn officers since July 1, 2020, which does not include the 27 abolished positions during the last budget. In addition, over the last several months, we have seen a precipitous number of resignations, due in part to labor unrest and the political environment in which we find ourselves in our county and state. That dynamic presents additional challenges, given that approximately 25% of our police department is eligible to retire at this very moment. In all, the workforce density presents significant stability and readiness challenges that this county has never faced, and quite frankly, is not prepared to address.

Here is our challenge: Recent polling of Lodge 35's membership shows that approximately 300 officers are considering resigning, retiring, or allowing themselves to be terminated if Bill 34-21 passes. These numbers are real and scare me as a resident of this county. They should scare everyone.

These are staggering statistics, given how seriously our members take being vaccinated, and primarily see being vaccinated as an important public health issue.

As of today, at least 76% of our members have been voluntarily vaccinated against COVID-19. That is one of the highest vaccination rates for a major police department in the region, if not the entire nation. It's incredibly unfortunate that this vaccine has been so politicized – on both sides – and has caused a rift in our police department and in our society. Lodge 35 has encouraged our members to get vaccinated, and have worked to make vaccinations a priority. In fact, back in January, Lodge 35 partnered with the county to stand-up the mass vaccination site for all public safety employees, which was tremendously successful, and which I know saved lives. I'm extremely proud of that.

But there another side to this, which can not be overlooked. Controversial as it is, we also understand and respect the sanctity of each member to make their own health care choices. In fact, we, as their representative, must respect those choices. There are a number of reasons

that people choose not to get vaccinated – some have already had COVID-19, some have underlying medical conditions, some take religion exception, or have some other personal objection. Whatever the basis of their decision is, it is their own decision – and one that should and must be between them, their physician, their families, and their God -- not their employer.

This bill is a dangerous overreach of the Council's authority, and is an intrusion into the province's of the Executive branch. For these reasons, we strongly urge you to oppose Bill 34-21.