



Department of Emergency Services & Public Protection

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Interim Commissioner Ronnell A. Higgins of the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection Testifies Before Legislature's Public Safety Committee

Interim Commissioner of the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection Ronnell A. Higgins testified Thursday in support of legislation that would streamline analysis of test results related to operating a motor vehicle under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

Under Senate Bill 230, only a breath test would be required to be given to a defendant within 24 hours of the result being known. Currently a chemical test is required to be delivered to a defendant and this can lead to lengthy delays, particularly when trying to track down the correct address of a defendant. Breath tests are immediately available.

If enacted, "the administrative burden on laboratory staff will be decreased and time spent on case completion increased, thereby improving our turn-around times," Higgins told the General Assembly's Public Safety and Security Committee. "Resolving the temporary court backlog created by pandemic disruptions is a key priority for the administration, and this proposal would help us get there."

Higgins and Dr. Guy Vallaro, Director of the Division of Scientific Services, also testified in favor of House Bill 5280, which would require DESPP to participate in the National Integrated Ballistics Network, a national data bank. The network, known as NIBIN, helps police investigators identify violent shooters.

"This bill would assist in the reduction of gun crime by using information extracted from guns and/or cartridge casings," Higgins testified.

Higgins also testified in favor of Senate Bill 234, an act that would exempt some records from disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act.

The proposed legislation would exempt signed witness statements that are captured by body worn cameras from being disclosed. Currently FOIA exempts signed witness statements from disclosure, but those statements are often captured in recordings made by cameras worn by law enforcement personnel.

Cynthia Isales, DESPP Agency Legal Director, joined Higgins and Valero in testifying before the committee.

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