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SHERIFF

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SHERIFF

STEARNS COUNTY

DAN MILLER
CHIEF DEPUTY

Greetings Members of the House Judiciary Finance and Civil Law Committee,

I am the Sheriff of Stearns County (St. Cloud) and was notified by our drug task force commander that your group is looking to make proposed changes to the laws surrounding search warrants and more specifically the No Knock exceptions. I have read the emails you have all received from St. Cloud Police Chief Anderson, along with my fellow Sheriff's in the Central MN counties involved in the makeup of our Central MN Violent Offender Task Force (VOTF) regarding the hearing for bill HF 1762. I had planned to write to all of you and let you know my thoughts on this topic as I believe it will endanger officers and the public along with my opinion on the fact that our law enforcement officers in MN are more professional and exceptionally "ahead of the game" as far as policy and procedures go; however, after reading the emails from my fellow leaders I am not sure I can add more to the opinions they have all provided.

The information they have provided is accurate, spot on, and based on real life experience. It is unfortunate that law enforcement across the country have been lumped into the same category as a very small percentage of officers who are bad. To place all law enforcement into this category is baseless and is a direct result of an unfortunate incident that is not the norm.

In regards to the proposed changes to the search warrant laws, I can testify that to take away a No Knock search warrant exception and limiting it to the categories that are being presented will cause both officer safety issues and harm to both officers and the public. One only needs to look at the recent murder of 2 FBI agents in Florida as they waited by a front door of a suspect (for child pornography) because he had the time to see them on his RING doorbell camera. Our local task force along with our officers are seeing more and more of these doorbells along with other surveillance camera systems that jeopardize their safety as they both approach a house for a warrant and stop at the door.

Prior to my being Sheriff, I was the Commander of our SWAT team and also, the commander of our VOTF in Central MN and approved, lead and conducted over 400 search warrants in my years of doing this type of work. We NEVER conducted a No Knock search warrant that did not need it or qualify for it due to the level of violence or dangerousness of the suspects. In fact, No Knock search warrants are not the norm and do not occur as much as one would think. There are many steps in place to review and reflect upon the facts to see if they rise to the level of a No Knock warrant.

Most MN law enforcement uses a format called a threat risk assessment that helps define whether a warrant of this type is necessary and further all warrants are reviewed by both a county attorney and then signed by a judge so there are many checkpoints along the way to cross check our work and the actual need for a no knock warrant.

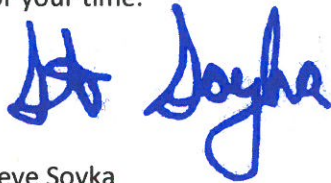
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I implore of you to take a step back and speak with actual law enforcement officers on the proposed changes you seek to make. Limiting the types of crimes to use a No Knock warrant on and to specifically leave out drug related crimes does a dis-service to the public. Drug dealers typically have large sums of monies in their presence and will do almost anything, including shooting police officers to protect it. This proposal needs to be looked at on what positive may come from its passing and I can tell you an officer being killed because the law was needlessly changed to satisfy some type of public opinion is not positive in anyway. Please take more time to research and get more facts from resident experts in the field that are actually doing the work, your MN law enforcement officers. Please feel free and do not hesitate to contact me should you need more information or wish to learn more about how these warrants are obtained and how they are conducted.

Thanks for your time.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "St Soyka". The signature is stylized and written in a cursive-like font.

Sheriff Steve Soyka