

Testimony of Alex J. Harris
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In Regard to Proposed Legislation on Police Accountability

To the Members of the Connecticut General Assembly:

I strongly support efforts to increase accountability and reform policing throughout the state. I specifically support:

- removal of police immunity protections;
- opening of disciplinary records for public scrutiny;
- use of social workers in lieu of police to defuse incidents;
- requiring police officers to intervene to stop police brutality and misconduct;
- the establishment of local and statewide independent civilian review boards composed of elected members with subpoena powers; and
- mandatory annual psychological evaluation of all police officers and generous mental health support services for all police officers.

Beyond those items which are already contemplated for the proposed legislation, I strongly urge that:

- (1) Police recruitment, training, and continuing education practices/curricula must be comprehensively and publicly reviewed and evaluated by a statewide commission of blue-ribbon experts in conjunction with the elected state and local review boards.

Over the last few decades a private industry of police trainers – many with little to no expertise and lacking any research or scientific rigor for their programs -- has developed and successfully indoctrinated a dangerously paranoid and predatory ideology in many police personnel across the United States. A public review/evaluation must examine all such programs in which members of Connecticut law enforcement have participated and determine whether and to what extent such indoctrination has occurred within/among the Connecticut force. The review should recommend actions to remediate any damage such training has caused, set standards for all training/continuing education going forward, and prohibit all members of Connecticut law enforcement from participating in any programs or instruction that do not meet the new standards.

- (2) Infiltration of law enforcement by extremist hate groups must be stringently investigated and personnel discovered to maintain hate group ties must be banned from working in law enforcement in the state, as such ideologies are absolutely incompatible with the mission and oath of protecting and serving ALL residents of AND visitors to our state and local communities.

Since the George W. Bush Administration, the FBI has tracked the dangerous presence of white supremacist and similar hate groups within local police forces nationwide. The unclassified version of an October 17, 2006, FBI intelligence assessment, titled “White Supremacist Infiltration of Law Enforcement”, under the section title “Strategic Infiltration and Recruitment Campaigns”, documented that, “White supremacist leaders and groups have historically shown interest in infiltrating law enforcement communities and recruiting law enforcement personnel.” That report specifically described the secretive nature of such infiltration within police departments, “Since coming to law enforcement attention in late 2004, the term ‘ghost skins’ has gained currency among white supremacists to describe those who avoid overt displays of their beliefs to blend into society and covertly advance white supremacist causes.”

An FBI Counterterrorism Policy Guide from April 2015, made public in 2017, stated that “domestic terrorism investigations focused on militia extremists, white supremacist extremists, and sovereign citizen extremists often have identified active links to law enforcement officers.”

Given the long history of anti-Black and racially-biased policing in the United States, it is imperative that the Connecticut General Assembly enact legislation requiring active, ongoing investigation and programs to root out hate group influences and infiltration wherever they may exist.

- (3) Prohibit the ownership and use of military equipment by local and state police departments statewide.

Militarization of the police has reinforced the paranoid “siege mentality” the private police training industry has successfully indoctrinated into many law enforcement personnel across the country (as described in point 1, above). Whether it be military armored vehicles or military body armor and gear, these tools are both unnecessary and further undermine the concept of a citizen police force sworn to protect and serve ALL. Rather than protect police or aid in defusing situations, these materials and the tactics they encourage police to employ, provoke and escalate.

Thank you for this opportunity to submit my written testimony. I look forward to final legislation which I hope will become a model for police accountability and reform across the country.