

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Ranking Members Kissel and Rebimbas, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Alyssa Pagan and I am from New Haven, CT. I am testifying regarding LCO No. 3471 An Act Concerning Police Accountability and police divestment. I believe police accountability is a major issue. Any legislation that is working to improve accountability is a start in the right direction. I thought sections 8, 9, 12, 17, 23, 40-41 clearly advanced the goals of accountability.

I believe Section 18 of LCO No. 3471 should be amended. It currently states that the police departments will do their own evaluation on whether social workers can respond to certain calls and be of assist. Although self-evaluations can prove useful for internal issues, I believe an independent third party must run the evaluation. Police cannot critically evaluate themselves and the institution in which they are employed, without bias.

That being said, without stating the importance of reallocating city budgets to defund the police and help social work organizations, the bill does not show any real commitment in supporting the work of social workers. Section 18 should be amended to prioritize defunding the police budget to reinvest money into services that will help the community. The statement “The municipality would benefit from employing, contracting with, or otherwise engaging social workers to help the police department” does not explicitly state whether social workers would be part of the police department or if they would be able to respond to issues independently.

We must not conflate advocating for more social workers as a reason to expand the police department. We need to prioritize reallocating city budgets to give social work organizations, mental health resources and education the resources they need.

Sincerely,
Alyssa Pagan
New Haven