

July 17, 2020  
Amisha Paul

**Written Testimony: LCO No. 3471 – An Act Concerning Police Accountability**

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

My name is Amisha Paul, and I am a junior in the College of Liberal Arts and Sciences at the University of Connecticut. I am testifying regarding LCO No. 3471, An Act Concerning Police Accountability. This bill outlines some important and necessary steps towards increasing police accountability and divestment in the State of Connecticut, which I appreciate and strongly support. However, this bill, without some additional provisions, will fall short of being as impactful as it could be. Furthermore, the conversation surrounding changing what policing in the state looks like must not end with the passing of this bill, rather the passage should be recognized as a first part of a conversation long overdue. A divestment of funds from our police departments and reinvestment in areas such as education, healthcare (including mental health services), affordable housing, and other community-oriented programs will ensure that we are building and strengthening our communities and providing an equitable standard of life for all Connecticut residents.

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**Some provisions are great first steps towards greater police accountability and divestment. I strongly support the steps outlined in the following sections:**

**Section 8** takes significant steps to increase transparency for the general public to learn more about Connecticut State Police behavior by changing the fact that the police are currently exempt from Freedom of Information Act requirements due to their union contract.

**Section 9** would also increase transparency by prohibiting the State Police union contract from withholding police employees' discipline.

**Section 17** grants the opportunity for municipal civilian review boards to have subpoena power, allowing them to provide meaningful oversight.

**Section 30** will hold police officers responsible to intervene when they witness wrongful uses of force, thus helping change police culture of protecting one another.

**Section 40** significantly limits the militarized equipment available to police, which is a critical step in divestment.

**Section 41** works to address the problem of qualified immunity, which acts as a significant barrier to holding police accountable in cases where people's constitutional rights are violated.

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**Some provisions are a good start, but would be made more impactful and positive for our communities with the inclusion of certain amendments:**

**Sections 33-35** create a position for a new inspector general to investigate uses of force and DOC custodial deaths. This position should be expanded to ensure there is the establishment of an independent prosecutor.

**Sections 1 through 4 and 15**, while aiming to increase accountability via requiring police licensure and strengthening the certification process, grants certification power to the Police Officers Standards and Training Council (POSTC). This is ineffective because the POSTC is composed of majority individuals in law enforcement. With most other professions that require some sort of certification, certification and decertification power and regulation is vested in an independent body. Giving police the power to regulate themselves will not result in accountability. Rather, an independent body should be tasked with carrying out any actions related to police accountability and certification.

**Section 18**, while recognizing the necessity of replacing police officers with social workers in order to increase safety in our communities, grants this power to the municipal police departments. Similar to the problem stated previously, giving police the power to regulate themselves will not result in any amount of change or increased accountability. As there is a conflict of interest in making this call to replace police officers with social workers, an independent body should be tasked to make this assessment objectively.

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Police violence is an issue all across the country, but we must recognize that it occurs here in Connecticut as well. Recognizing police brutality and violence as a problem in our local communities is a very important first step in dismantling these racist systems that continue to foster inequity and injustice in our communities. This bill presents some great first steps in this process and would be tremendously strengthened if these outlined amendments are included. I strongly urge that this bill, with the suggested amendments, be passed by the General Assembly in order to strengthen our Connecticut communities and progress in our fight for a more equitable society.