

STRENGTHEN AND PASS LCO 3471 AAC POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY

July 20, 2020

Dear Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom and members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Angela Bellas and I live and vote in Manchester, CT. I'm a PhD Candidate at the University of Connecticut School of Social Work and a member of Uniting for a Safe Inclusive Community- Manchester. I support many sections of LCO 3471 AAC Police Accountability and strongly advocate for strengthening the infrastructure and mechanisms for police accountability in Connecticut. I appreciate the work that went into developing this proposed legislation to increase transparency and police accountability across state and municipal departments with an attempt to begin to address a long legacy of racialized police brutality and abuse of power.

I reject the language of bad apple or rogue police that reduces police violence to individual actions rather than systematic oppression. Policing in the United States is deeply rooted in white supremacy, dating back to the slave patrols. State violence against Black, Indigenous, and people of color has been perpetrated and reinforced by law enforcement throughout U.S. history from colonization to the present day. Law enforcement violently enforced the Black Codes after the Civil War and enforced Jim Crow laws for nearly a century longer.

Breonna Taylor. George Floyd. Ahmad Arbery. Atatiana Jefferson. Michael Brown. Rekia Boyd. Jayson Negrón. Pamela Turner. Mubarak Soulemene. Aiyana Stanley Jones. We are in the streets and on our screens demanding justice for countless victims of police violence- nationally, across our state and right here in the town of Manchester where I live. Jose "Jay" Soto was shot and killed by four CREST (Capital Region Emergency Services Team) officers within seconds of coming outside after negotiations. Jay was unarmed and his family members had begged police to show restraint, sharing that Jay suffered from PTSD. Instead another mother grieves her son in the state of Connecticut, in the midst of a global pandemic that also disproportionately kills Black and Latinx people. Connecticut needs to strengthen police accountability legislation to protect civilians and provide justice for families and communities who suffer the brunt of over-policing and state sanctioned violence.

There is a consistent lack of accountability for police officers perpetrating violence against civilians.

Lack of police accountability persists nationally, across Connecticut and here in Manchester where I live.

Connecticut police have killed 18 people with tasers since 2005. 12 out of these 18 people killed were Black or Latino according to ACLU Connecticut. At least 21 people have been killed by police officers in Connecticut over the last 5 years (these are conservative estimates according to Justice for Jayson organizers who put this number at 30 people killed by police over the last 3 years alone) . Not a single officer has been charged with any crimes in connection with these deaths (Rondinone, 2020). 16 of these investigations have already been "resolved" and five remain open. 21 families continue to grieve a husband, brother, daughter, sister while the officers responsible for their deaths remain free and compensated a family sustaining wage at the cost of Connecticut taxpayers. This is not accountability. Connecticut must do better.

I strongly support **Section 41 to establish a civil cause of action against police officers who deprive an individual or class of individuals of the equal protection or privileges and immunities of state law.** We must end qualified immunity for police officers who violate civil rights and perpetrate violence against civilians.

Police officers must be held accountable for their misconduct. Just as physicians must carry the liability for malpractice, so much police officers be held liable for violating the civil rights of civilians in our state. Corrections officers should also be included in this section of the legislation. Qualified immunity perpetuates the idea that police officers are themselves above the law. We cannot allow this to continue in Connecticut.

Regarding Sections 8 & 9 Collective Bargaining and Public Records

All complaints, internal affairs' reviews and personnel records of officers against whom complaints have been made by civilians, should be subject to FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) for full transparency.

Regarding Section 17- I strongly support the need and the right for municipalities to be able to establish civilian review boards with subpoena powers and full investigative powers. We should expand this section to mandate civilian review boards and to mandate subpoena powers for civilian review boards.

Regarding Section 19 & 20 Body Cameras and Dashboard Cameras

National outcomes on the efficacy of body cameras are mixed. Without codified accountability around body cameras being turned on and used, body cameras aren't effective in providing true transparency or actual accountability. There must be real consequences for not turning body cameras on or else the investment into this technology and video storage is not well spent.

Sections 21 & 22- Prohibition on Consent Searches

Connecticut must ban all stop and frisk related policies and outlaw police searches without probable cause, even if consent is offered. Police officers are frequently intimidating and civilians consent out of fear.

Section 21- Prohibition on Consent Searches

Connecticut must outlaw police officers from asking for any documents other than a driver's license at traffic stops. Asking for any non-driving related identification is unnecessary. Remove the clause that allows officers to ask for other identification if a person cannot supply a driver's license- this puts undocumented residents at risk.

Section 30- Officers' Duty to Intervene to Stop Use of Excessive Force

It is imperative that officers are mandated to intervene when they witness excessive force and that when officers intervene, they do not face retaliation from other police officers.

Section 29- Justified Use of Deadly Physical Force and Chokeholds

Strengthen use of force language from objectively reasonable to necessary. This standard should also include an officers' entire engagement with a person(s) rather than just the moment when severe or deadly force was used.

Section 33- Office of Inspector General

Establishing the Office of Inspector General is an important step in building the necessary infrastructure for independent investigations into use of force and other police misconduct. Police accountability is not possible without independent investigative entities at the state and municipal levels.

Section 40- Prohibition of Police Using Military Equipment

Connecticut does not want or need militarized policing in our communities. We must divest from the 1033 program and dispose of militarized equipment. We understand that the militarization of our police officers only endangers our communities- especially Black and Brown communities.

What this bill should not do:

- We do not need increased funding for municipal or state police departments. Defunding police is required so that we can reinvest more funds in safe/healthy/affordable housing, healthy food access, clean water & air, education equity, universal quality healthcare for physical and mental health, family sustaining wages and a robust safety net.
- POST should not be overrepresented by police and elected officials.
- Social workers should NOT work under police departments. Instead we must invest more in models for community accountability and collective care which should include social workers outside of the police department.

What's missing from this bill

The bill should also remove School Resource Officers (SROs) from schools.

- The school to prison pipeline is real and disproportionately impacts Black and Brown youth
- Research demonstrates that Black youth are perceived as up to 4 years older than their white, non-Hispanic counterparts ([Epstein, Blake & Gonzalez, 2017](#), 2019; [Goff, Jackson et.al., 2014](#))

This bill is just a starting point and we have a great deal of work ahead of us to truly transform policing and ensure accountability. You have an opportunity to pass strong legislation that will make Connecticut safer for all of our residents, especially our BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of color) residents. Please amend and pass LCO 3471 An Act Concerning Police Accountability.

Thank you,

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