

July 16, 2020

The events that led to the killing of George Floyd are not new. The issues that have come to light over the past several months are those that our country (and our state) have been dealing with throughout history. What is new, it seems, are the difficult conversations and actions that have taken place throughout this country, and which may lead to positive and meaningful change if lawmakers and communities can come together and rebuild a system which leaves too many people behind. The proposed Bill 3471 aims to do exactly that. I support this bill and ask you to do the same.

I have been a teacher for over 20 years. Most of my time has been spent teaching low-income students in mostly black and brown communities. I have witnessed the injustices that are handed down to minority youth by law enforcement and the judicial system as well as the fear they hold of those who are supposed to protect and serve them. As I complete a Master of Social Work at Sacred Heart University, I have come to more fully understand the policies that have brought us to where we are. Bill 3471 seeks to change those policies and thus promote accountability and transparency within the criminal justice system.

I am particularly supportive of section 18 of the bill ("evaluation of social workers responding to certain police calls"). Law enforcement has been thrust into the mental health field. Police officers are overwhelmed with issues that don't directly concern law enforcement and with people who don't pose a threat to anyone other than themselves. Most police officers are ill-equipped to deal with mental health and addiction crises. We need another approach. Investigating the feasibility of using social workers and/or mental health professionals to deal with non-violent calls related to such things as mental health issues, substance use, homelessness, and welfare checks has been shown to be a positive addition to communities that have tried it. Connecticut could be a leader in a state-wide initiative doing just that.

Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,  
Anika Knox  
Fairfield, CT