

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony following the listening session on Friday, July 17, 2020. My name is Barbara Fair and I am a West Haven resident and long- time justice seeking activist relative to criminal justice and corrections. The hearing was very enlightening. I was able to witness many patterns of behavior, some positive and some negative. I witnessed a lot of implicit bias and subtle racism and a tremendous amount of strong opposition to shifting the culture of policing from a warrior mentality to a guardian mentality. It was sad to witness the complete denial of the difference between how communities including schools are policed. Many in predominately white communities support SRO's in their schools and communities and talked about the positive relationships they have made. None of it was surprising to me. Unfortunately, we don't all share the same experiences, therefore working on this legislation seeking racial justice one must view policing through a racial lens.

First of all, there is nothing independent in establishing an Inspector General office with State's Attorney connection. In the previous bill to address police accountability legislators believed (not I) having a prosecutor from a different district investigating police misconduct would make it independent. I knew merely moving a case from one district to another was simply a symbolic gesture. It's not like prosecutors do not interact with each other as well as police departments across the state and so we received the expected outcome. Allocating another million dollars to this system and expect a different outcome is simply ludicrous. Operating in this manner effectively maintains a system that has yet to favor the people who seek justice against overly aggressive and unlawful police officers who have harmed or killed their loved ones.

Eliminating qualified immunity is a serious concern for towns and cities who knowingly allow rogue officers to remain on their force. It is also a huge concern for families of those rogue officers and I can understand that because the behavior of their loved one can place the entire family at financial risk. Others claim it will cause officers to hesitate in doing their job. When we see how quickly unarmed men, women and children are killed within seconds of an encounter I believe the hesitation is a good thing and will save lives. As things stand now police abuse and kill with impunity never giving loss of life of others a second thought. Imagine if the officer who shot and killed 12-year-old Tamir Rice had hesitated for 30 seconds his mom would not have lost her beloved son on that day. How about 14 year old Aquan Salmon from Hartford shot in the back as he ran from him or maybe the elderly Mack Lucky in New Haven who entered an elevator with an officer and a dog whom he was afraid and within a couple of minutes the young officer who had been an officer less than 2 years shot and killed him or even the officer who shot and killed 20 yr old Malik Jones as he sat in his car because he "gave him a hell of a look" or in West Haven when a 20-yr old sat in his car windows rolled up and officers broke his window and shot him several times or what about Amadou Diallo if only he hadn't reached for his wallet he might not have received 40 shots or how about 7 year Ayana Young who lie sleeping on the couch when police burst in her home guns blazing killing her? Just imagine how hesitation and de-escalation on the part of the officer could have saved those lives. Countless incidents like these. Somehow when the suspect is white police have restraint and bring them in unharmed even after they have committed mass murder. You will hear officers say "Had they followed commands from officer they might be alive". Is it really that easy to take someone's life? Are officers allowed to be that arrogant and indifferent? Is their behavior easily justified simply by stating they operated within policy, policy that can be excused simply

saying what the officer acted “reasonably” or “he believed he was in danger even when the person is running away from them”. To simply state that officers were justified because they acted in a lawful manner, even when they kill, is ‘shameful and criminal in itself. When I hear “obey the law” I’m reminded that slavery, and Jim Crow and other social policies written to control the lives of African Americans were all lawful. For one speaker to make the ridiculous comment police more white people than Black as though it was some kind of defense. When whites are over 70% of the US population of course more whites will be harmed. The point should have been made unarmed African American men are disproportionately killed by police and officers are primarily white killing nonwhite citizens.

One of the committee members brought up the case of Tony Timpa, a white man in Dallas, Texas who died in 2019 after an officer pressed his knee on his back as he was handcuffed and face down in the grass for 14 minutes before he realized he was dead. Maybe had the government prosecuted this man George Floyd would not be dead today because there would have been policy in place to protect the lives of people in custody restrained unable to do anyone harm yet they didn’t. Society’s continued failure to reign in violent officers either on the street or within corrections and their makes them partly responsible for countless needless death in Connecticut and across this nation. Time to save lives instead of officer’s egos. We can no longer deny police violence is at an all -time high and a threat to civil discourse. Hopefully eliminating immunity protection might lead to officer restraint. For me, police accountability is not about George Floyd. It’s long overdue. I can’t explain why people were horrified by George Floyd and not Rodney King or Eric Garner or so many before. Many videos ago people should have been appalled at police behavior across this state and nation. Rodney King was the first video that sickened and infuriated me. The last one watched was Eric Garner. I refuse to watch anything after that because of the impact it had on me. To see a man choked to death on national tv and the Police Union and officers be so deeply upset that he was fired and a go- fund me page was established collecting millions to support him was deeply insulting. Why not support Garner’s children who lost their father due to an over active ego and police arrogance? The unspoken message rang loud and clear that some lives are valued while others are deemed dispensable.

If police chiefs believe there will be an exodus of officers should they lose qualified immunity then so be it. Any officer not involved in brutality or unjustified loss of life has nothing to be concerned about. Every other profession must carry their own insurance against violations of people’s rights and so why are police, prosecutors and even judges. Why are they exempt from facing consequences for violations of the oath they take in their profession? it is my belief once these professionals are held accountable it will be the first step in dismantling centuries of government sanctioned racial injustice. One must ask why have we built all these protections to attach to criminal justice professions while no other profession is afforded the same.

How many mothers must watch videos of their children being gunned down, pinned down, choked to death and kicked before we as a society decided we absolutely must do better. WE must take a deeper look into hiring from the military where officers join the police straight from a war zone. Way too many end up in urban communities where their behavior goes unchecked and police unions protect their jobs at all costs. The real work is not about firing officers. It’s about transforming the culture of policing which origins were slave patrols. Slave patrols deeply rooted in racism. Policing definitely looks different

when officers work where they live. Due to the nature of policing it doesn't matter if the officer is Brown once he or she adopts the blue code of behavior and silence.

Policing is a systems problem that can't be reformed. It must be uprooted. Making police accountable for their behavior is long overdue. The people are no longer willing to accept baby steps to justice. We can no longer accept excuses, delays, political stunts to derail the passage of the bill nor watered down, compromised legislation. Good and decent police officials invested in undoing centuries of racial injustice are supportive of the bill. Only those who wish to maintain this system of blue privilege will strongly oppose it. Time to move forward in American history.

Thank you again for your time and attention.

Barbara Fair, West Haven