

*Hello, Thank you very much for this opportunity to weigh in on the legislation before you relative to police accountability. My name is Barbara Fair, a West Haven resident, founder of My Brother's Keeper and member of steering committee for Stop Solitary-Ct. I come before you foremost as a private citizen who has worked diligently for many years to undo some of the many injustices people in my community and beyond have faced for a lifetime.*

*I am quite aware undoing the wrongs and demanding change comes with huge opposition and so I am here to do my part to lend support to Senator Winfield and others who are committed to making sure this legislature serves all the people from across all social and economic backgrounds, ethnicities, religions and genders. Those who wish to continue violating the rights of others including killing people with impunity will undoubtedly push back real hard and so we the people most impacted intend to push just as hard for our right to live and breathe.*

*As we you address Police accountability make no mistake Correctional accountability is just as important to those housed in correctional facilities across this state. It must be included in this legislation. I am not interested in another 63 page bill to address something that can be addressed in this bill especially since Corrections is already mentioned in the legislation. For those caged behind bars protection from those who abuse, neglect, terrorize and kill without being held accountable is also imperative.*

*Connecticut has seen 71 police shootings/killings over the past 20 years and all have been deemed justifiable by those charged with investigating police shootings. Despite Governor Lamont's recent statement that "we don't have a police problem in Connecticut" it is not how residents outside Greenwich see it. As a matter of fact there were 4 fatal police shootings in 2019 and 3 in the month of January, 2020 alone. All have been justified by those put in place to make objective decisions involving police killings.*

*The reason Corrections must also be included in the legislation is because Connecticut has failed to protect the lives of prisoners during the COVID-19 pandemic. There had been numerous calls for release of incarcerated people and they have fallen on deaf ears. The Commissioner of Corrections resigned from his job amid the pandemic. Nearly every prison became infected. Hundreds were*

*sickened and 8 died and still no real plan to save the lives of those behind bars even as the virus rapidly spread and social distancing was all but impossible. I have received numerous letters even before the pandemic relating to officer abuse.*

*A little over a year ago a young man housed at New Haven Correctional Center who had mental health issues was placed in restraints, pepper sprayed and left in isolation where he later died. A video showing him being kicked by a correctional officer led to a misdemeanor charge of assault. No one is held accountable for the reckless and negligent behavior that led to his death. It's just one of the many reasons why the behavior of Correctional officers MUST be addressed in this bill as well.*

*It has taken years to get to this baby step toward justice and even now we suspect there will be legislators who will come kicking and screaming with concern for everyone except those who are being abused, neglected and killed at the hands of police and correctional officers. We know contributions to legislators influences their decision making. This MUST stop. People's lives are being needlessly harmed and lost. Families are needlessly suffering. One must ask when does humanity kick in when officers, correctional or police interact with others in public and behind bars? Do they lack humanity or do they not recognize the humanity of those whose lives are under their control? I'm not sure.*

*One of the problems is that many of these people are employed following a military experience. It has been said veterans receive a pass when they apply for police or correctional officer because training for both are so similar. As a private citizen and a mother and grandmother I find this practice extremely problematic because we are essentially placing these people who are trained killers to have power over people whom they may see as "the enemy". These are people who have returned from war and now due to the many instances of PTSD may feel like they are at war on our streets and behind bars where no one is watching. We also know that despite police being videotaped it has not deterred them from abusing and killing others. It is likely because they have powerful union support and prosecutors closely aligned with police justify their behavior every time.*

*It has been said it takes years to get legislation passed and yet in my many years of being involved in legislative work I have seen legislation get passed and undone*

*within one session. I am reminded of the murders of the family in Cheshire and how within one session legislation was passed that made burglary become a more serious offense of home invasion. That experience showed me when legislators value the lives of the victims their willingness to pass meaningful legislation in a short period of time is intensified. I'm asking you to have that same energy to pass meaningful legislation with tough language to end this violent and deadly behavior toward vulnerable people at the hands of state sanctioned enforcers. Consequences should be clearly spelled out within the language with no discretionary loopholes to avoid prosecution for willful misconduct. The suggestion that an Inspector General take over investigating police shootings with State's Attorney being the one to choose who that person will be is also problematic since the State's Attorney continues to find every police shooting justified even with video evidence of the contrary.*

*The dismantling of this evil system involves undoing various arms of the laws whose tentacles reach from local departments to Dept of Justice and even the Supreme Court. If we are not deadly serious about undoing injustice then we are simply spitting in the wind and I'm not sure how much more people can take. We are on the streets in protest because both police officers and correctional officers have become completely lawless. When the law becomes lawless it breeds anarchy which is what we are witnessing on the streets across America. People are fed up with blatant injustice and continued killing of vulnerable people. People are fed up with a justice system that emboldens officers on the streets and behind bars to violate our constitutional rights without consequence.*

*Attorney General Tong recently stated that Trump's plan to deport international students was "serious and cruel". This coming from the very man who has fought every effort to release some people from prison during this pandemic to protect them from being infected with COVID-19.*

*We need to see language in the bill to shift from "may" to "should". "Reasonable" and "reasonably believe" as well as "probable cause" are also buzz words that leave a crack in the door leading to subjective interpretations. We can't accept that language because the officer who shot 14 year old Aquan Salmon in the back in Hartford in 1999 found that reasonable to do and those who investigated the killing agreed. When Malik Jones was shot and killed in 1997 sitting in his car the*

*officer said he gave him “a go to hell look” and so it was reasonable to shoot and kill him. When an elder was shot and killed in an elevator in 2004 in New Haven the officer thought it was reasonable to shoot him. It was also reasonable to shoot Breonna Taylor and 7 yr old Ayanna Stanley Young while they slept in their homes. It was also reasonable to choke Eric Garner to death, break Freddie Gray’s spine, squeeze the life out of George Floyd, and shoot and kill young men carrying a cell phone and another a hair brush “reasonably believed” to be a gun. with those outcomes we can’t leave what’s reasonable up to the system tha hiresds these killers.*

*So many of our people end up incarcerated not because we are more lawless but because the law is selectively and aggressively enforced in certain cities. We know that. There’s been an abundance of research proving that yet we do nothing beyond have conversations about it. We’re tired now. We can’t continue to operate in the politically correct manner while our people are abuse, neglected, terrorized and murdered with no one being held accountable. It’s time for justice. African Americans suffer the most within this criminal justice system and have for centuries. When they are released from prison they are broken and scarred. Hurt people hurt people. That’s one of the main factors in why our communities are suffering. When people return home, they find the reentry they were told about is a pipe dream. Many end up homeless, jobless, angry, suffering PTSD and drugs help them cope. Many of you never have to think about that. Some of you actually benefit from the pain of our people. Prisons help your economy grow while our people die inside so I am clear why you won’t be moved to change what is.*

*Both police departments and Department of Corrections need to have their budgets reduced. We will never police and incarcerate away social problems. In doing so we cause more community harm. Millions need to be reallocated to serve vulnerable communities allowing our children to flourish just like yours. Remove police out of our schools and bring back unarmed security officers. Having police in our schools have simply criminalized our children opening the door to a school to prison pipeline. Remove police and correctional officers from psychiatric spaces. People with mental health problems come there because they are sick and if they can’t control themselves they become criminalized in the very environment they sought help. We depend way too much on people who have warrior mindsets as opposed to servant mindsets. Adding the ingredient of racism is a deadly*

*combination and it has played out over and over again in our communities. It needs to stop and the right legislation, bold with real consequences might be the deterrence needed.*

*Annual mental health assessments should be mandatory for both police and correctional officers. 5 years is much too long to have a mentally unstable individual interacting with vulnerable people. Assessment should include random drug screenings for all drugs including steroids. Screenings include administrative staff. We're seeing chiefs driving under the influence and breaking the law with a tap on the wrist while civilians go to prison. This dual kind of justice needs to end. The law should apply to all equally. Police and Correctional unions should seek pride in having professional staff above reproach instead of supporting rogue officers by any means necessary. Supporting rogue officers undermines the integrity and legitimacy of the agencies. Finally, there should be whistle blower protection for officers who have integrity and wish to intervene and report on crime among their cohort. If we want them to do the right thing, we MUST protect them from retribution.*

*Thank you again for the opportunity and let's do the right thing for a change. Give people hope that they can believe in something. Without hope there's no telling what the outcome will be for our society.*

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