

State of Connecticut



LEGISLATIVE BLACK AND PUERTO RICAN CAUCUS
LEGISLATIVE OFFICE BUILDING, ROOM 4100
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591
(860) 240-8585 OR 1-800-842-8267

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Joint Committee on Judiciary
Legislative Office Building, Room 2500
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Chairmen Winfield, Chairmen Stafstrom, Ranking Members and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee,

I would like to remind everyone that we are here because another Black man has been killed.

The murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Tamir Rice, Anthony Vega Cruz and countless others at the hands of an unchecked and increasingly militarized police force has brought demands for the reforms which we discuss here today. I would like to use my time before you today to address some of the many systems of inequity that have actively worked against the interests and livelihoods of Black and Brown residents in our state for decades, and that this bill fails to address.

Notions of public safety shouldn't have different meanings depending on to whom you speak or where you come from. We must end broken windows policing; expand the power of community oversight; and implement statewide independent investigations and prosecutions of police misconduct to allow for the just punishment of officers who break the law. Additionally, we must also put an end to qualified immunity. If we hold doctors accountable for malpractice, should we not hold our police officers to a higher standard? In the end, if the police aren't doing anything wrong, then they have nothing to be afraid of right?

Putting an end to police brutality treats only a symptom of the injustices baked into the socioeconomic systems that make up our country. This is a multifaceted issue that is compounded by centuries of hate. To truly make progress toward equality in our society we must address economic and environment injustices, education and housing inequality, and equal voting rights.

When it comes to the economy, true economic justice cannot be achieved until we end the criminalization of poverty and level the playing field. That means providing a worker's compensation presumption, sick pay and increased access to PPE for those on the frontlines of the pandemic and committing to continued financial relief efforts for those most vulnerable. Beyond COVID-19, we must also commit ourselves to providing long term investments and economic opportunities in low income neighborhoods.

We must always keep in mind that environmental justice is racial justice. We must update existing environmental laws to account for their civil rights impacts. There are vast public health-related environmental inequalities that plague our lower income communities. Accountability measures such as

this are increasingly necessary at a time when individuals with underlying health conditions, attributed to poor air quality and the prevalence of industrial pollution, are more susceptible to the detrimental effects of COVID-19.

There's a lot of criticism of calls to "Defund the police", but for decades we have defunded education, and it's those in poor and urban communities who are impacted the most. Every child in our state should have access to a great public education. It is time to close the opportunity and resource gap by investing in students and giving them the tools they need to be successful and choose their ideal path for the future.

We all know that home ownership is the foundation of wealth building. We must expand no-strings-attached homeownership opportunities for families in the communities in which they live. We must hold municipalities accountable if they continue to enact and enforce segregationist practices. Only with stable housing opportunities can we begin to break the cycle of poverty in our state.

Lastly, for communities of color especially, voting is a hard-fought fundamental right. As COVID-19 has taken thousands of lives in Connecticut, no one should have to risk their health and wellbeing to exercise their Constitutional right this November. Every necessary accommodation must be made so that every resident has access to a ballot, including absentee/distance voting. While the legislature will be meeting to address this issue specifically, I am highlighting it as an issue due to the many vocal voices both in the legislature and throughout the state that are actively working against our access to these safety measures that will allow us to vote from home.

No single platform or bill can right centuries of wrongs, let alone one special session, and the global COVID-19 pandemic has only served to exacerbate these issues. It is now more important than ever to overhaul systems and regulations that enforce and enable racist policing and pair them with policies that would better the quality of lives of those most damaged by the effects of systems that have left them out or actively harmed them. We need to ensure greater economic justice through increased protections for those on the frontlines through services like a workers' compensation presumption and hazard pay; reforms to systems of policing including increased measures of accountability and transparency; policies that would make housing more accessible to low income residents; a commitment to expanded voting rights during the pandemic and beyond; making educational opportunities more equitable; and the creation of environmental justice impact analysis on existing state laws to better understand how our regulations and current laws affect the health and well-being of low income residents and communities of color.

The Black and Puerto Rican Caucus has worked tirelessly with legislative leaders to have robust legislation that will address these pressing issues. This watered-down legislation is a disappointment. We are missing the point entirely. Black lives matter. Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Brandon L. McGee, Jr." The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Brandon McGee
State Representative
5th House District