

Brian Eckblom, Tolland CT

I am employed as a command-level officer in a Hartford County agency. I hold a masters degree in criminal justice. I have worked as a patrol officer, school resource officer as well as traffic reconstructionist. I have been an instructor, field training officer, victim services officer and I am trained in crisis intervention. I am an emergency medical technician. I am proud of my agency, our officers and my community and the professional services my department provides.

I have several concerns with this bill as it is proposed. I believe passing this legislation as it stands would do a great disservice to the citizens of Connecticut, our municipalities and our officers. Any real, honest conversation by experts would refute much of what the public has come to believe about policing in Connecticut. Our state has consistently been at the forefront of adapting to policing changes, adopting best standards and being responsive to our communities. We are not Minneapolis, we are not Seattle, we are not Atlanta. We need to stay calm, and continue to use the Obama administration's report from the Task Force on 21st Century Policing as a guide and template in legislation and policies regarding policing in Connecticut. We should not enact knee-jerk legislation that is anti-police and will have long lasting negative implications. I have picked several specific sections that cause me the greatest concern in an effort of brevity and the hope that my comments will be read and considered by my legislators.

1. Qualified Immunity changes.

I am concerned that the public believes that qualified immunity means an officer or agency cannot be sued. It does not. It simply limits the lawsuits to violations that an officer should have known about. Repealing this protection will create an untenable situation where officers will be worried to act, it will make it hard to recruit and retain candidates, and it will cost our municipalities a tremendous amount of money. Officers must make split second decisions in times of high anxiety and danger. The Supreme Court has recognized that these decisions are second-guessed with the luxury of time and information. Making officers fearful of being sued will undoubtedly result in loss of life as well as a tremendous economic impact on the municipalities. Officers will need to be compensated for this additional liability, either through salary increases (think about physicians who have nowhere near the amount of supervision and intense scrutiny that officers have and their insurance needs) or through liability insurance provided by the towns. Without this, the job does not make economic sense for officers with families and assets.

2. Deadly Force

I believe that any concerns with use of improper deadly force in Connecticut is directly related to hiring practices and training. I believe that changing the law will create situations where an officer will need to consciously put themselves at risk while determining if they have met a legislative mandate while attempting to arrest someone. The current law, as it stands, is crystal clear. If you are not threatened with imminent use of force that could cause death, you cannot respond with such force. This is enshrined in Supreme Court case law, *Tennessee v Garner*. Best practices, model policies, and proper training (which is not addressed in this legislation by the way) are the answers to deficiencies in this arena.

3. Consent Searches

The concept of consent searches is one of law enforcement's most valuable tools. Consent searches keep people safe. They cannot be coerced. They allow officers to de-escalate and determine the level of danger at an incident. Taking away consent searches will certainly result in a larger number of use of force incidents and arrests, or a lack of enforcement and contacts. It is simply too dangerous a job to take this tool away.

4. Non-Driver Identification

Similar to consent searches above, identifying people in vehicles is critically important for the safety of the public and officers. Not being able to determine whom you are dealing with as an officer will result in more injuries or a lack of enforcement and contacts. It is critical for the legislature to be mindful of the number of domestic-abusers, trafficking victims, felony-level arrests, and others that are identified and detained after traffic stops. Removing this practice from the police will quickly be known by the criminal element and used to their full advantage and will hinder the apprehension of wanted criminals and make our state much less safe.

5. Mental Health evaluations

I have no qualms with this particular item. However, I do believe that there will be a substantial cost to municipalities, as well as a question of liability. Who will pay the disability and ADA protections should an officer develop a mental health disqualifier as a result of the job? Who is paying for the mandatory evaluation? We are making strides in the area of officer mental health, the experts at the Connecticut Alliance to Benefit Law Enforcement (CABLE) should be consulted with.

6. Security Officer Employment

The provision regarding security officer employment for de-certified officers appears punitive. When the legislature is considering restorative justice and rights of felons, it appears purely punitive to deny a citizen a specific job category after they have been deemed unsuitable for another one.

In conclusion, I urge you to not rush to penalize the law enforcement community in Connecticut for the actions of officers in other states and jurisdictions. Our state is at the forefront of policing in America and we are leaders in community policing, restorative justice and reform. We are at a moment in history that has the attention of our entire country and world, and it should be utilized to effect meaningful change, but I do not believe it should be focused on policing here in our state. The media has demonized my chosen profession and has created an incredibly hostile environment where we are being judged by the actions of others with no connection whatsoever to our state.

The legislature should use this moment in history to focus on socio-economic issues that are the root of

the disproportionate justice system contact with minorities in Connecticut. We need to have honest and thoughtful conversations, not driven by media manipulation and statistics that are taken out of context or are deliberately misleading. As we look at other states and cities nationally and see the results of hurried reactions involving policing, I do not see improvements, I see growing crime, police officer dissatisfaction and communities losing control. Rushing to pass this legislation will have far-reaching and unintended consequences that will take many years to remedy and will result in a more dangerous state that will not offer the taxpayers the protection and service they deserve and pay for. Please slow this process down and be intentional and mindful in your decision making.

Thank you for your consideration.

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