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On Draft LCO #3471

First and foremost I want to say I am generally in support of bill #3471, but it should be further improved upon. On page 6, the mental health assessment for police officers is mentioned. It is stated that starting in 2021 that administrators, “must require each police officer employed by the unit to submit to a periodic mental health assessment at least every five years as a condition of continued employment,” (6, Bill 3471). This is not often enough. Police officers should be required to have a mental health assessment at least yearly, and should be encouraged to attend therapy regularly.

Many officers speak about the stress of the job, and the risk they are putting themselves at every day. Creating more programs for officers to join therapy may help to prevent future events from occurring, and a therapist would also be able to be aware of an officers mental state on a regular basis. This would help the officers both as people, but also the communities they serve. Mental fortitude is a necessity within an occupation such as this and should be cultivated in healthy ways.

On page 9 the bill states, “Under current law, when the State Police participate in suppressing a riot or similar disorder, they are entitled to the same privileges and immunities as the organized militia,” (9, Bill 3471). It later mentions that these privileges and immunities will only apply to members who comply with the policy. What measures are going to be in place to ensure that these immunities and privileges are not abused? What process will be required for someone to comply with the policy? For these policies to be backed by the public, we need to be

involved in crafting them. If people are not helping to design these policies, how will they be effective to truly support communities or be able to be trusted by them?

Implicit bias training is also brought up on pages 9-10, but this training must actually be done correctly. Often diversity and inclusion programs get seen and treated as a waste of time. If they are to be effective, people need to truly believe in them. The Harvard Business Review states, “It shouldn’t be surprising that most diversity programs aren’t increasing diversity,” and then, “companies are basically doubling down on the same approaches they’ve used since the 1960s—which often make things worse, not better,” (Dobbin and Kalev, 2016). Officers need to give their full effort towards these programs, but also to creating the necessary cultural shift for these programs to be worth everyone’s time. This may be a difficult transition, but if the police have entrance exams that push their future officers in mental and physical means, this is just another mental test that all officers should be able to pass.

On page 27, section 30 states, “The bill requires any police officer, while in his or her law enforcement capacity, to intervene and attempt to stop another officer from using force that the witnessing officer objectively knows is unreasonable, excessive, or illegal,” (27, Bill 3471). Why has this not been a previous rule? It needs to be implemented, but it already should have been. Police need to hold one another accountable, just as any other person should. There should always have been protection from officers retaliating at their peers holding them accountable. Protections need to be in place for those who are willing to acknowledge wrong doings too.

On page 27, it is later stated that “The bill also requires any police officer who witnesses, or is otherwise aware of, another officer using such force, to report the incident,” (27, Bill 3471). How is this going to be enforced? If an officer decides that there was not enough force to quantify a report, then what happens? A good way to solve this issue, is to have someone who

regularly monitors every interaction between officers and civilians. If this position already exists, then that is great. If not, it is a fairly simple accountability measure to implement.

On page 35, the prohibition on quotas is introduced. It prohibits quotas for citations to exist, this is something that should have been in policy. Officers should not be looking for people to ticket, that is not the point of the police. No one being protected or served from receiving a citation due to a quota. All that comes about is incentives for police to look at individuals as numbers rather than people. With this removed, hopefully we will see un-necessary interactions between people and police.

On page 36, the prohibition on police using military equipment is mentioned. The section states, “The bill requires each law enforcement agency, within six months after the bill’s passage, to lawfully sell, transfer, or otherwise dispose of any controlled equipment in its possession,” (36, Bill 3471). This is an inclusion I support completely. Our police are not the military, though some of them may have military experience that is not their current occupation. Having access to military grade equipment further separates the average person from a police officer. It creates the image that people of our country are potentially a threat big enough for the police to become mini militias. Instead officers should be seen as our peers who we trust to help our communities. Eliminating military grade equipment will bring us one step closer to being able to have mutual trust.

On page 38, it is stated that, “The bill specifies that neither governmental immunity nor qualified immunity are defenses, nor is it a defense that a violation was not made in furtherance of a policy or practice of the law enforcement unit,” (38, Bill 3471). To this point I agree completely, as mentioned by the *Patriot Act*, qualified immunity creates opportunities for police officers to not be held accountable. If police are paid by tax dollars, then people should not have

to jump through various different hoops to hold them liable. Police are people before they are officers, and ensuring that everyone is treated equally in the eyes of the law is how the law *should* be enforced.

An interesting thing about Connecticut is that we have a lot of economic power for a small state. One question I would like to ask, is what is the thing the state spends the most on? That is the University of Connecticut (which is great), but it is followed by the Department of Corrections (DOC). We spend over 440 million on the DOC, yet our prison population has been declining (prisonpolicy.org). How is it that we have a decreasing prison population yet spend the second most on prisons?

This seems like a gross misuse of funds, and it is important to remember that when people say defund the police, they also mean defund the DOC. It seems unjust to spend more on the DOC (440.12 million) than the Department of Education (155.38 million), Mental Health and Addiction services (133.03 million), and the Department of Social Services (118.93 million) combined (Openpayroll CT). Our tax dollars should go towards developing better communities, but when we spend more on education than the DOC where are our priorities?

Our priorities are reflected by everything we do as a state. Right now our priorities should reflect what the people protesting are asking for. Civic duty is taught in classrooms, but is often neglected in the real world. Now is the time for action, and if CT can lead the nation in COVID-19 response, why not also lead the nation in Police Reform and Social Justice Initiatives.

Works Cited

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