

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly,

Our names are Gemeem Davis and Callie Gale Heilmann, residents of Bridgeport, CT. As Co-Directors of Bridgeport Generation Now, we are submitting testimony on behalf of our organization. Bridgeport Generation Now (BPTGN) has been working toward a number of goals in our city that are relevant to “An Act Concerning Police Accountability.”

Expanding the scope of reasons for which Police Officer Safety and Training (POST) may decertify officers is a step toward accountability for abusive officers. It is our hope that through this change, POST will be able to decertify Bridgeport officers who have harmed people and betrayed public trust. In addition, the recommendation to sunset membership of POST and clean up the criteria for appointment, is an example the Bridgeport Police Commission could be modeled after to diversify the voices of decision-makers and increase transparency and effectiveness. Finally, we suggest that POST require and implement anti-racism training instead of implicit bias training. Anti-racism training would require police officers to address white supremacy, internalized racism, and systemic racism at the individual, group, and institutional level - something that implicit bias training does not.

The effort to tighten the type of military equipment that municipalities may purchase through the federal 1033 program is also a step toward demilitarization. It is our hope that this change in course for policing in Connecticut will not only remove high-powered weapons from Bridgeport, but also achieve our additional goal of removing dark tint from police vehicles which make it difficult to see the public servants working in our city. Also, the effort this bill makes to establish Civilian Review Boards across Connecticut will hopefully support local reform of our Citizen Complaint process, which is notoriously ineffective in Bridgeport, and has left residents feeling as though they have no options for recourse.

There are a number of items in this bill that are favorable to the cause of ending police violence that will have a direct impact on Bridgeport. Through this bill’s stance on use of force, we hope to see comparable updates to Bridgeport Police Department’s policy and make our community safer as a result. In light of the millions of dollars Bridgeport has lost to police brutality settlements, BPTGN has considered the option for police officers to carry liability insurance at their own individual expense as well. We look forward to seeing this become a standard in the state. In addition, with the death of Breonna Taylor causing shockwaves across the country, Connecticut would be wise to ban no-knock warrants in our own state to save lives.

This bill has the potential to decrease the violence people experience as a result of policing. Another goal of BPTGN is to reallocate funding from policing into education, housing, and other approaches to public safety. This shift in funding and resources will have a direct impact on the violence people experience in their communities due to a lack of investment. This

bill takes aim at some necessary measures to decrease police violence and BPTGN looks forward to additional progressive means at ending police brutality in our state.