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## Testimony Supporting With Changes LC#3471

**July 20, 2020**

Good afternoon. My name is Cindy Prizio of One Standard of Justice, Inc. testifying in support of LCO #3471, "An Act Concerning Police Accountability" with changes.

One Standard of Justice is a volunteer-based civil rights organization committed to ensuring that persons accused or convicted of sexual offenses in Connecticut are treated constitutionally and fairly by the state before, during and after their sentences through the use of evidence-based policies.

Connecticut and especially our communities of color and economic disadvantage, have been living under a system of carceral strategies and statutes that have resulted in more money being spent on corrections than higher education. Instead of community building, these strategies have resulted in severing the family structure, building a lack of trust in citizens that make them less willing to help in the policing of their communities. The result of these misplaced strategies and laws is an extraordinarily expensive system of programs to try to remediate the social and economic destruction they create.

It isn't just the ever-expanding list of laws, with corresponding lengthening of sentences, that preoccupy each legislative session and that perpetuate the ongoing onslaught against the social and economic fabric of our communities of color and economic disadvantaged that is a problem. It is also the militarization of public safety organizations operating under the protection of both statutes and administrative structures that exacerbate the problem.

We want community building peace officers whose job is also to enforce the law, not law enforcement officers who see their job as the first step in a destructive carceral system.

What is really needed is a fundamental rethinking of what justice should look like. That begins with the first step of reforming the qualifications, training and certifications for peace officers at all levels of government in our state. The proposed bill makes a significant step in the right direction. What is missing is the same level of scrutiny and reforms at the back end of our carceral system by requiring the same level of training and accountability for our correctional officers.

The reality is that crime is at a 50-year low. As repeated academic research has shown this isn't a result of mass incarceration strategies but an extraordinary resilience of those oppressed communities of color and economic disadvantage.

OSJ has some concerns with certain parts of the proposed bill which we describe below. More importantly, OSJ encourages the governor and legislators to use this as a first step in a much more challenging examination into how to rebuild our fractured communities in ways that build successes, not create social, familial and economic destruction through an ever-increasing minefield of laws with ever-lengthening sentences; that reinforces and rebuilds both our social fabrics and social capital; and that incorporate restorative justice as a way to both redefine justice and build community trust.

After listening for 12 hours to the Listening Call before the Judiciary Committee, OSJ is concerned with the polarization between the police officers on the call and our CT citizens. Police officers often said “no problems” yet citizens and advocates, OSJ included, spoke of systemic racism in the state especially in larger cities. Multiple officers spoke of walking away from their jobs if qualified immunity is eliminated. One gentleman, I believe an attorney and or related to unions, couldn’t believe that some citizens and legislators wanted all stakeholders at the table, including “criminals”. What I heard on the call were two factions - peace officers in one corner and citizens/advocates in the other. The police were highly defensive. If Connecticut moves to a restorative practices and principles model it would have helped us to not only listen but to hear what the other side was saying and look for the common ground. All stakeholders must be heard — not only stakeholders from the government agencies! Being in a minority group that works with marginalized people who are often left out of the conversation OSJ knows firsthand about not being invited to the table. We must ensure “nothing about us without us.”

There ARE bad apples within all CT public safety organizations - law enforcement or peace officers, parole, probation and correction. Yes, the bill is about or should be about policing strategies to build and sustain safe, healthy communities. Not all peace officers are bad; or conversely not all are good. Without a reckoning, an elimination of the “by the book” officers which often translates to abusive police and corrections officers who can threaten, intimidate or groom other officers easily influenced in their ways, this policing bill will have negligible effect. We’d like to see the same process Camden NJ went through - fire all police officers and rehire peace officers who have the training and psychological make makeup to build community and trust. In doing so Camden chose to nurture the relationships with their citizens thereby eliminating the us versus them mentality. Trust was rebuilt. Both the police and citizens of Camden now work together. A consequential result of the new approach to policing is a rise in the job satisfaction of the Camden police force.

I am stunned that in the year 2020 with so many citizens’ deaths at the hands of police in our state, that every Connecticut police officer and car is not already equipped with cameras. I am further appalled that there is even discussion on whether or not badges should be prominently placed so the officer can be identified easily by our citizens. What is most stunning of all is that in the year 2020 we are still fighting to end Black men, women and children from being killed in the streets, in their homes and in our prisons by police and correctional officers.

#### CORRECTIONS/Violence in prisons

Within local jails and state prisons the correctional officer serves as the voice of authority, while also ensuring the safety and welfare of people serving their sentence. Instead we hear of corrections officers often inciting violence or committing crimes. Grievances if not discarded are examined and decided on by other corrections officers.

The commissioner of the DOC once told me he would never take the word of an “inmate” over a corrections officer. What is most concerning is the violence perpetuated by correctional officers that shouts “we are above the law” taking place in prisons. How is it okay to take a person to a room without cameras and beat the daylights out of him. We heard from a legislator that it happened to her son who ended up in the hospital the morning after with severe injuries.

OSJ is working with two families who have had loved ones treated in this same way. One gentleman was beaten at Northern. He was beaten daily by both officers and the incarcerated because of the classification of his offense. He never pled guilty, was convicted at trial, and maintains his innocence to this day. Two weeks ago, he was released on a VOP — he is so traumatized by his incarcerations he is seeking therapy. Every time he sees a person in a police uniform, it's a trigger for him. Corrections officers emotionally, psychologically and physically abuse CT citizens within jails and prisons without remorse or any concern of punishment or consequences.

The person in our second family was beaten by 5 corrections officers in retaliation for a legal action he won. This abuse case is pending in federal court. We must insist on independent oversight of Corrections be included in LCO #3471 to protect one of our most vulnerable populations. As we have heard through testimony from Colleen Lord whose son died in solitary at New Haven's CI, there are wrongful deaths both within our communities and inside our jails and prisons. Often the public never gets the full story as to what really happened. There are seldom any real consequences.

Senator Champagne is concerned over the fiscal note of hiring an Inspector General and staff. I'm wondering what the state - meaning taxpayers --pay out each year in wrongful death settlements and wrongful imprisonment. What is it worth to rob someone of 20, 30 years of his life or a family of their loved one forever? What I hear is the voice of Corrections who said to the CT Innocence Project back in the 1980's, we have no innocent people in Connecticut prisons. And finally, we know of cases whereby the prosecutor is building a case against a bad apple and an incarcerated person agrees to help with the case. Once the case is prosecuted (we can cite two) the person inside the prison is left with no protection and often is not moved to a new facility which leaves him open for retaliation by both corrections staff and other incarcerated individuals.

OSJ believes LCO #3471 must meet the acid tests of transparency, accountability with consequences that stick, independent oversight of all government agencies and ALL voices heard! The tables that may be implemented must have agents of change, who are willing to lean in to these very tough conversations, hear each other and work toward a solution incorporating dignity rather than hopelessness, equal protection under law for all people especially our Black and brown communities, and bring all CT citizens to a better place—safe and sustainable communities.

LCO 3471 must include the following:

- 1) Eliminate Qualified Immunity - peace officers must be held accountable for misconduct and have consequences
- 2) Eliminate the use of solitary confinement and chokeholds.
- 3) Include Correctional and Parole officers in the bill.
- 4) Dash cams and body cams for all peace officers and body cams for corrections and any peace officer working inside prisons and jails. If excessive force is used and someone within the community is harmed or killed, if a person inside prison or jail is harmed or killed and the officer does not have his camera on, impose immediate firing of the officer.

- 5) Prohibit motor vehicle stops solely for motor vehicle issues.
- 6) Prohibit consent searches, prohibition on asking for non-driver ID/documentation
- 7) Implement whistleblower protections so that it is an officer's duty to intervene when another officer is using excessive force. Citizens' safety comes first. If second officer does not intervene, then complicity in action.
- 8) Visible police badges and name tags identification mandated.
- 9) Office of Inspector General. This function cannot be connected to the state's attorney by being physically housed at the same location and or administratively. Hiring should come from the CT Criminal Justice Commission chaired by Judge McDonald. In order to earn the respect off our citizens, we must insist on complete independent oversight.
- 10) Prohibition of consent searches in people's homes.
- 11) Social workers should accompany police on certain calls but not be direct employees of the department.
- 12) Eliminate quotas for traffic stops.

Sincere thanks,  
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One Standard of Justice, Inc., a state affiliate of National RSOL

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