



State of Connecticut COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

Central Office ~ 450 Columbus Boulevard, Hartford, CT 06103

Promoting Equality and Justice for all People

JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

Friday, July 17, 2020

Testimony in Support of LCO 3471

AN ACT CONCERNING POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY

Greetings Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Senator Kissel, Representative Rebimbas, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. The Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities ("CHRO") is grateful for the opportunity to provide testimony regarding SLCO 3471, which seeks to increase police accountability and address systematic bias in policing. The CHRO has heard countless stories of people of color experiencing anxiety when a police officer or vehicle comes near them. People of color have disproportionately been the victims of police violence in this country. This bill takes some good first steps in trying to attack this long standing injustice and make Connecticut a state where Black lives truly do matter.

We strongly support Section 41 which would allow for a civil action and eliminate qualified immunity for officers. This would remove an important barrier for victims to be able to address their grievances. Our only recommendation would be for language to be added that confirms unequivocally that those who believe they were treated with discriminatory bias can also file a public accommodation complaint with the CHRO. Pursuant to the Alvin W. Penn Act, citizens are already apprised of this right when they are ticketed and provided with information to contact the CHRO if they feel the police interaction was discriminatory.

Sections 21 and 22 are a step in the right direction to address racial bias in enforcement by eliminating consent searches for motor vehicles and persons. As has been shown, motor vehicle searches disproportionately affect people of color despite such searches being less likely to produce evidence of criminal conduct. <http://www.ctrp3.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/2018-Connecticut-Racial-Profiling-Report.pdf>

However, there is room for improvement to ensure that the demographics of the community are adequately represented on the two major bodies that will either investigate the feasibility of other improvements, or oversee the law enforcement agencies within this state. First, neither proposed amendment to Section 7-294b (Section 13, Line 507) contains any requirement that the Police Officer Standards and Training Council be comprised of people of color or women. The amendment to take effect on January 1, 2021 provides for only two people with a disability (one with a mental health disability and one with a physical disability), and two "justice impacted" people. This Council will be in charge of oversight, training and certification, of all police officers. Therefore, it should reflect the ethnic makeup of the community it represents. There should be requirements that a portion of the Council's 18 members be women and people of color in proportion to the state's demographics. Second, the composition of the task force under Section 12 also undercuts the proportion of people of color and women who live in this community. The requirement of only 3 of its 13 members be from a minority or affected group is insufficient to ensure the community is



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participating in necessary ongoing reform efforts. Neither of these important bodies includes any requirement that the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities participate. As the oldest civil rights agency in the nation, and an agency that investigates allegations of discrimination by the police, our agency should participate in the task force.

In addition, Section 10(a), while a good step to addressing the racial disparities in police departments compared to the communities in which they serve, fails to define “relatively high concentration of minority residents.” All law enforcement units should strive to reflect the demographics of the population they serve. By failing to clearly state such goal in the bill, the purpose is undermined.

Like others have testified, determining the feasibility of adding social workers to the law enforcement units should not be left to the police departments. Rather, section 18 should be incorporated in the duties of the task force under section 12(a).

The CHRO **supports** LCO 3471 which the suggested amendments. The Commission thanks you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of this bill.