

July 17, 2019

Dear Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Ranking Members Kissel and Rebimbas and members of the Judiciary Committee.

I am a West Hartford resident and University of Connecticut student writing to you about Draft LCO #3471 An Act Concerning Police Accountability. I support the intent of this legislation, which is to bring greater accountability to police officers, especially those who racially profile, brutalize, sexually assault and murder civilians. However, I also want to see Connecticut work to divest from policing so that our state can increasingly invest in our communities. We need to re-fund education, health care (including mental health services), affordable housing and other essential social services and public goods. Thus, the bill needs several amendments before I would support it. Below are such amendments.

In Sections 1-4 and 15, the current language grants the police authority to police themselves in the certification and decertification process. This language should be amended to create an independent body (that does not have a conflict of interest) to be in charge of this process.

In Section 33-35, the current language does not go far enough. We do not merely need a new inspector general position to investigate police use of force and DOC custodial deaths. We need an independent prosecutor.

There is substantial evidence showing that implicit bias training does not reduce police brutality or significantly change police behavior. Therefore, the mandatory implicit bias training should NOT be included in this bill.

In Section 18, the current language has police departments evaluating whether social workers would be useful or not to replace the police for some work. Because police have a conflict of interest in making this call, the language should be amended so that an independent body, without any conflicts of interest, determines the use of social workers.

I'd also like to remind legislators of a finding. "One 2016 study found that 92.6% of prosecutors' offices nationally in jurisdictions where police wear body cameras have used that

footage as evidence against private citizens, while just 8.3% have used it to prosecute police officers” (Norwood, 2020). Thus, this finding supports the contention that body cameras do not increase police accountability. However, body cameras CAN do these things if they are accompanied by adequate policies that provide real accountability for police. Without those proper policies in place, these devices can easily transform into tools of unnecessary surveillance on communities, used against communities.

Sections 8, 9, 17, 30, 40, 41 are great first steps toward greater police accountability and I support these sections without major changes.

Please consider my suggestions, honoring the deaths of Mubarak Soulemane, Zoe Dowdell, and several other Connecticut residents.

Thank you,
Corona Zhang
West Hartford Resident

Sources

ACLU of Connecticut (2020, July 16). “ACLU-CT Testimony Regarding LCO No. 3471, An Act Concerning Police Accountability.” Available here
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Norwood, C. (2020). “Body Cameras Are Seen as Key to Police Reform. But Do They Increase Accountability?” PBS Newshour. Available here
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