

Hello,

My name is Daniel Houser, and I have been a resident of Ridgefield, CT for my whole life. From Ridgefield, I have generally had amicable relationships with police. However, the institution of policing, in my view of its history and its present day status, is rife with issues and disparities that make my experience of policing hardly representative of everyone's experience. Black, Brown, Indigenous and People of Color undeniably bear disproportionate impacts of police violence and incarceration rates in the U.S. I think this points to fundamental issues in policing, as well as a complicated web of structural, historical and modern day issues. This Bill, LCO #3471, I think is a good start in addressing some of these issues by increasing police accountability. However, I believe it does not go far enough, and is in danger of falling even further short if sections 40 and 41, which demilitarize police and limit qualified immunity, do not remain intact.

While I have not been in the position that police officers are put in daily, and admittedly do not understand what they bear, I see that instances of rash abuse of power are far too widespread to let the "a few bad apples" argument go unscrutinized. There are fundamental issues in the way policing in the U.S. and in CT operates, that place both police officers and the public at risk. One of these issues in my view is unaccountable power. No one should be in the position to kill someone with virtual immunity from consequences. I think this is changing and it should change. Police officers should be treated as the human beings they are, rather than superhuman. As human beings, they are bound to make mistakes. As citizens and as lawmakers, we should do everything we can to both decrease the potential harm of these mistakes, through clearer and stricter use of force regulations, and hold officers accountable for their mistakes, for instance by limiting qualified immunity. Every other citizen would face these consequences if their actions resulted in severe harm or death, and there is no reason that police officers should operate under the assumption that they are immune from these consequences, for they too are citizens, human beings, bound to make mistakes.

In this way, I believe that sections 1-4, 15, and 18 should be reconsidered. The Police Officer Training and Standards Council, in my limited understanding, includes a majority of law enforcement officers. I believe that the police cannot be entrusted with the responsibility of policing themselves, if only for the same reason listed above - that they are human. Human beings want to be right, and at the very least do not want to be wrong. And it is known that the police tend to stick together no matter the amount of wrong that one officer may do. I believe therefore that a majority of the police Council is incapable of objectively evaluating whether officers should be certified to or decertified from being police officers. Section 18 similarly needs to be rethought. If we are to do an honest evaluation of whether social workers can be employed instead of police to serve certain community needs, that evaluation cannot be entrusted to police alone. We need an independent board to be responsible for this crucial step towards reimagining policing and creating more safe and whole communities.

These are just a few of my comments on specific sections that I think are important and some that I think should be amended or redacted. However, I urge whoever is reading to heed the arguments, needs and demands of communities of color, community-led organizations and the ACLU, rather than folding to the pressure from police unions and police officers who are resisting accountability. When immense levels of privilege begin to be taken away, it will feel like oppression. However, many communities in this state live under the oppression of unaccountable police and deserve more. I believe that if police officers do not want to be held accountable, they have no business being police officers. I believe that a police officer who truly wants to protect and serve the public will want to be held accountable by the public and will act as such. If we do hold accountable not make it easier for the public to hold police officers accountable, we cannot expect their behavior to change, and we can expect more Jayson

Negrans, more Mubarak Soulemanes, more Breonna Taylors, George Floyds, more violence and less justice. We the people deserve more.

Thank you for reading
Daniel Houser