

July 16, 2020

Dear distinguished members of the Joint Committee on the Judiciary:

I urge you to vote in favor of An Act Concerning Police Accountability, LCO #3471. Policing reform must be part of solution to address institutional racism and racial inequality that endangers the lives of black and brown people.

Limiting unwarranted use of force, improving training, expanding transparency, shifting responsibility of non-law enforcement tasks from armed police officers, and most important, holding police accountable for unjustified and unnecessary use of force are all areas where stronger regulation can root out racial bias and its [disproportionate](#), and sometimes deadly, impact on people of color.

I am an activist in the gun violence prevention movement, so in part I view policing from a gun violence perspective. We cannot escape the fact that police violence is gun violence, regardless of whether the victims of police brutality, who are disproportionately black and brown Americans, are actually killed or injured with a gun. The impunity with which corrupt and racist police officers victimize black and brown Americans (and others) is enabled by the arms they carry. But for the guns on the hips of Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin and his fellow accomplices, bystanders might have intervened and George Floyd might be alive today.

Reforms of the sort included in LCO #3471 are designed to reduce police brutality, which will in turn reduce gun violence. It's important to note that supporting these measures does not imply that all, or even most, law enforcement officers are racist or indiscriminate in their use of force.

Nor can we overlook how America's lax gun laws and rampant levels of gun ownership (more than 400 million) increase the danger of policing. Studies [show](#) that there are higher rates of police-involved killings in states with higher rates of gun ownership and weaker gun laws. Partly because of the arming of U.S. civilians which increases the risks of police encounters, police shoot and kill nearly 1,000 Americans every year. Blacks bear the brunt of the killing, dying at the hands of police at twice the [rate](#) as whites.

Strong measures that help keep guns out of the hands of criminals and other prohibited persons, such as the ban on ghost guns passed by the General Assembly last year, will benefit police as well as civilians.

But today the focus is on addressing police violence. I urge you to support the measures in LCO #3471 to reform police accountability and begin to address systemic racism in Connecticut.

Thank you,

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