

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly,

My name is Julian Shafer. I am a Bridgeport resident and a high school history teacher here in Connecticut. We're here today to review our representative's legislative response to the national Black Lives Matter movement, a movement that has asked us to critically assess the founding and functioning of police and prisons in our society. Unfortunately, I think the premise underlying An Act Concerning Police Accountability (ACPA) has entirely missed the point of this critical assessment.

So let's take a moment to assess. Why do we have police and prisons? We often tell ourselves they exist to keep us safe, and to punish people who do bad things. But what does the history say? In 1784, the State of Connecticut passed the Gradual Abolition Act, an act that drew out the emancipation of enslaved people over 60 years. Enslavement ended in Connecticut in 1848 in a time where there was also a rising immigrant population and xenophobia. That very same year, Bridgeport, the city I live in, established its first police department. It makes me wonder, what is the purpose of police?

The call to action in this moment is not to hold an institution inherently designed to control Black people's livelihoods accountable. The call is to decrease police and prisons capacity to control their lives in the first place. In 1994, the US Congress spent 14 billion dollars on "community policing" services and trainings, yet there was and still is little to no scientific evidence that these trainings have had any positive impact on policing. The idea of civilian review boards appears nice on the surface, yet in all the years they've existed in the US, they have rarely, *if ever*, sustained complaints made against police officers. Year after year, our CT legislature has added layers upon layers of accountability for police, yet we see the violence of policing worsen. If safe communities are what we seek, then we need to consider what are the conditions that make communities unsafe to begin with, and what can we do to change those conditions? If shame, isolation, being victimized by violence and being unable to meet one's economic needs are the causes of violence, our solutions should be tailored to ending these conditions.

The call to action in this moment is to reimagine what makes Black people, and the rest of people living our state safe. While the hashtag #defundthepolice tends to light dialogue on fire over social media, I really want you to listen and consider what this idea means on a deeper level. Instead of continuing to invest our finite time, resources and political capital on training and accountability that has not worked, the CGA needs to prioritize moving resources from the police into evidence-based public safety solutions that work. Invest in the CURE Violence model, which has decreased shootings by 30%-40% in the neighborhoods where it was implemented. Write legislation that allows people to pursue conflict resolution through restorative justice rather than incarceration. Guarantee affordable housing to everyone that needs it. Guarantee affordable healthcare for all. Shift resources to social workers who help clients work through trauma and conflict. Again, take the money we've spent on police in the name of public safety, and reinvest it in solutions that remove the conditions causing crimes to

happen in the first place. Until we make this shift, accountability solutions will only be band-aids over the violence of policing and austerity.

Thank you for your time,

Julian Shafer