

KARI A. SWANSON

35 Potter Road, North Haven, CT | kari.swanson@outlook.com

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Members of the Joint Committee on the Judiciary
Connecticut General Assembly
Legislative Office Building, Room 2500
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, and other distinguished members of the Joint Committee on the Judiciary:

Today I write to you as a concerned citizen in support of LCO #3471 An Act Concerning Police Accountability (AACPA).

As I am sure you are all aware, in the spring of 2019 Paul Witherspoon, a young Black man who lived in New Haven, was accused of having committed an armed robbery at a convenience store in Hamden that is very close to the campus of Southern Connecticut State University. As a result of the wrongful allegation a Hamden police officer pursued Mr. Witherspoon and his girlfriend Stephanie Washington, a young Black woman, into the city of New Haven without informing the New Haven police of the pursuit. The Hamden officer and a Yale officer who arrived as backup fired 16 bullets at the unarmed couple, wounding Ms. Washington in the torso as she sat in the passenger seat of her own car. Then, as seen on video recorded by a witness, the officers dragged from her vehicle, bleeding and crying out that they had shot her, and threw her onto the ground.

Neither officer properly activated the body cameras that they were wearing. The Yale officer was suspended for 30 days and reassigned to administrative duties. Months after the incident the Hamden officer, who had been on administrative leave, was arrested and charged with felony first-degree assault and two counts of misdemeanor reckless endangerment. It remains to be seen if the Hamden officer will be fully held accountable for his actions. Regardless of

the outcome: Mr. Witherspoon and Ms. Washington were terrorized by people whose job is to protect and serve the public, and who arguably should take such extreme actions only when and if absolutely necessary and even then based on evidence not racist ideas about who is assumed to have committed a crime.

It is overwhelmingly apparent that racist ideas and racist policies are woven into the fabric of law enforcement in our country and our state and have had and continue to have profoundly negative effects on individuals and communities of color. Racist ideas and policies lead to disparate treatment of individuals based solely on the color of their skin, which leads to wrongful arrests, injuries, and even death. This is confirmed by both anecdotal and statistical evidence.

From my perspective LCO #3471 takes steps to counteract these racist ideas and policies and their effects by ensuring that law enforcement professionals in our state are rigorously screened during recruitment, properly trained prior to service, provided with ongoing mandatory education throughout their careers, and, most importantly, held accountable for their actions. These requirements are no different from the requirements of other professions in which professionals' actions profoundly impact the lives, or cause the deaths, of Connecticut residents.

Sincerely,

Kari A. Swanson