

To the Judiciary Committee and local Representative Carpino,
My name is Katelynn Puorro and I am a resident of Portland, CT. I support the Act Concerning Police Accountability.

I am a Licensed Master Social Worker. It took 6+ years, an undergraduate degree, graduate degree, three internships, certification, licensing and annual continuing education to maintain that license to do the work that I do. I'm also currently pursuing the Clinical Social Work License which requires 3,000 hours of post graduate work experience, 100 hours of supervision and testing. I have also known, befriended, loved and worked with police officers in various settings.

When I hear police officers say that they "play social worker" it infuriates me. I don't "play doctor" because I'm not qualified to do so. Police officers receive nowhere near the amount of training and education that social workers and the like do. I have spent years, and will spend more, learning to conduct crisis intervention, victim services, mental health support, suicide assessment and intervention, working with individuals with developmental and intellectual disabilities, group psychology, family dynamics, LGBTQ+ populations, human oppression, de-escalation, substance abuse treatment and so much more. That's not to say that police officers don't perform needed, often life-saving duties, but they are not mental health specialists; they are not social workers. Some may have criminal justice degrees, but those courses of study most often lack classes in human behavior, atypical development, crisis and suicide response, mental health and substance use conditions, family and group dynamics, restorative practices and de-escalation, and more that seem as though they should be 100% necessary to do the job of policing. Police officers are often called upon to respond to situations that they lack the skills for. It's not fair to officers and it's not fair to the public.

I began my social work career in Austin, TX working in the Travis County Attorney's Office in the Family Violence Unit; Victim Services; Protective Orders. Austin, TX and Travis County employ social workers and mental health professionals in every level of the criminal justice system; jails and prisons, police and sheriff departments, county and district attorney's offices. They employ specialized mental health officers, have large social and human services departments, and use specially trained constables and investigators to help enforce and carry out duties of the law. Austin, TX and Travis County aren't perfect, but they certainly provide an eye-opening example for how properly trained professionals can help to support both the public and the police department. In the course of my work I confidently responded to actively suicidal individuals, those experiencing severe mental health conditions, crisis intervention around violence, hostile and aggressive individuals, people under the influence, and more. Currently I work for a public municipality in close partnership with the public school system. Each school in that system has roughly 500 students. There are zero school social workers but there are school resource officers.

I support every single aspect of the Act Concerning Police Accountability. There isn't a single section of the act that I disagree with. Those that stand out to me are certification (and adversely decertification), implicit bias training, transparency and accountability task forces, civilian review boards, social workers responding to calls, limitations on justified use of deadly force, duty to intervene, civil action against police, changing qualified immunity, prohibiting consent searches, prohibiting asking for non-driver identification, mental health evaluations for officers.

Police officers are often tasked to perform duties which they are not educated, trained or prepared for and that makes all of us, them included, less safe. It is a disservice to them as much as it is to the public. I know and support good officers, but we must be proactive, *not reactive*, around the abuse of power, acts of brutality and systemic discrimination and oppression (namely racism) in our communities.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Katelynn Kelly Puorro, LMSW

Certified School Social Worker