

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Ranking Members Kissel and Rebimbas, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Katharine Morris. I am testifying regarding LCO No. 3471, An Act Concerning Police Accountability. I am a Masters of Public Policy student at UConn and scholar-activist with special focus on environmental justice and now abolition of the police and prison industrial complex. I am a Hartford resident, although I have lived in many towns/cities across the state. I say that because it is relevant to my experience with Connecticut police. When I lived in Trumbull, I rarely saw the Trumbull PD. One time, however, I was in the car with the father of my baby sister, who was speeding. Justifiably, he was pulled over. The officer was going to issue a speeding ticket, noting the extra danger of having two children, including a one year old, in the car. Once he mentioned that he was a retired police officer, suddenly, there was no problem. No ticket. That was my first experience of so-called, “police accountability,” an officer, serving or not, could break laws and get away with it. (Reference Section 30 - Police “blue wall of silence” is systemic and prevents true accountability.)

I moved to Bridgeport a couple years later. I was incredibly shocked to walk into Bassick High School and have to pass through metal detectors to receive my underfunded public education. Whom would I be greeted by first thing in the morning? Police officers, who would search my bookbag as they told me “good morning” and wanded me down if my jewelry or belt set off the detector. The first five minutes of my first day of high school were deeply disturbing. Mind blowing, even. What struck me more was the fact that no one else around me saw how absolutely insane it was to be treated as criminals AT SCHOOL. Still, there was not much education actually going on if we’re being honest. **This bill lacks mention of the removal of all police from all public schools. This is a non-negotiable minimum to end the “school-to-prison” pipeline for Black and brown students just trying to learn.**

Predominantly BIPOC schools should be run and funded the same way as predominantly white schools. Poor “inner city” schools need funding for guidance counselors who will help students succeed and strive for their best and brightest futures. They need scholarship and college fairs, not weekly military recruitment outside the cafeteria where students receive their free lunches, which may be their last meal of the day. When students are policed, under-educated, and recruited to sell their bodies to the military more than they are spoken to about college, you are sending a very clear message. That city/town, state, and nation, are telling those students that their future does not matter. It says that not only are their bodies threatening, but they're also the only thing valuable about them. Black education matters. If you believe that, then you will vote to **defund the police and re-allocate funding into an education** system that actually gives students a chance to strive rather than to struggle to survive. Furthermore, all public schools must accurately depict “American” history which absolutely necessitates the full, mandatory education of Black/African-American and Indigenous history in public schools. This also requires the removal of lies which glorify a horrendous, blood history shaped into statues of racists.

On the topic of the military, **all police in the state must be prohibited from acquiring any/all military equipment including weapons, surveillance drones, AND vehicles.**

(Reference Section 40.) The military industrial complex is one of the greatest contributors to greenhouse gas emissions and thus climate change. In fact, the U.S Department of Defense is the largest institutional consumer of petroleum (oil), and thus the single largest producer of greenhouse gases in the world. When states allow police departments to militarize, they perpetuate the growth of the military industrial complex, thereby perpetuating climate change. By virtue of environmental racism, Black and brown people are disproportionately impacted by the malevolent effects of climate change. In short, the militarization of the police kills Black people using bullets and greenhouse gases. The state must divest from the police and invest in the Transportation Climate Initiative, which Governor Lamont pulled out of, with an emphasis on remediating environmental racism. Prove that Black futures matter.

The topic of climate change is really a discussion on the world we're setting up for future generations to inherit. It's a discussion on the health of the world and its inhabitants. **When we say defund the police, we mean invest in communities. When we say abolish the police, we mean liberate the people from the remnants of slavery, liberate the people from the war on drugs, liberate the people from the war on poor communities.** I believe defunding the police is a reasonable strategy for gradual abolition that allows communities to heal from systemic racism and economic disparities and develop alternative public safety. Studies show that crime is the result of poverty driven desperation. When you reduce poverty, you reduce crime. Increasing police does not do that. In fact, all that does is increase police brutality. Raise the minimum wage to a livable wage. 15\$ by 2023 is not a livable wage in the fifth richest state in the country with the second highest income inequality in the country. Poverty is a prevalent social determinant of health. Poverty is violent. Poverty does not need to exist as it does. Neither does the police.

The idea of reforming police accountability is almost satirical in my opinion. Those who have done the research know that the police originated as a form of slave patrol. When slavery "ended" via the 13th Amendment, slavery was actually reformed into a "punishment for crime" for which one is convicted by the former slave owners. Today, the United States profits off of modern day slavery in the form of mass incarceration in the private prison industry. This is the case in Connecticut as well. I must reconcile that the University of Connecticut, from which I will hold two degrees, profits off of the enslavement and subjugation of my people via the prison industrial complex. That does not sit well with me, nor should it sit well with you. The state must decide practically and morally where it stands. Will it remain one that invests in hate, white supremacy, murder, rape, slavery, and overall counterproductivity? Or will we lead the nation's humanity by choosing a brighter future that allows all people to live and thrive by investing in our communities? Members of the Judiciary Committee and all voting legislators of the state of Connecticut, the choice is yours to make. **I urge you to make the right one.**

Yours truly,

A Black life that matters.