

To the Judiciary Committee

State of Connecticut

Regarding: LCO#3471; An Act Concerning Police Accountability

Good afternoon,

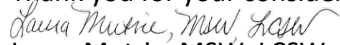
My name is Laura Mutrie, and I am a life-long resident of Milford (62 years). I am also a clinical social worker, an educator, and a long-time student of American History. I am writing to support the spirit of the proposed law and to express my concerns about some provisions of the act.

First, I am in full support of responsibility for investigations into police misconduct being spearheaded by members of the community in the form of civilian review board, and I also support the position of an Inspector General and the civilian review boards in the communities. I fully support provisions to end the militarization of our police, and protections for immigrants who are stopped for minor traffic violations. I am deeply saddened that we must legislate that police officers report the excessive use of force by a colleague. The very idea that we cannot expect the meaningful integrity of our police officers is to me a sign of the deeper issues that this bill attempts to fix without thorough and thoughtful consideration of alternate solutions.

I do not think the bill goes far enough in other areas, and one particular issue I have is the insertion of social workers into the current system without reconsideration of the broader funding of the safety net for marginalized and mentally ill citizens, particularly people of color. Often victims of police violence (rather than the other way around), the mentally ill in our state are left without adequate resources for and access to quality care. When issues arise, tragedies like the needless killing of a seriously ill youth in West Haven, occur. Rather than address the issue of the police not being equipped to respond to these types of social and health issues, the bill supposes that sending a social worker with a police officer will solve the problem of expectable fear and mistrust that black and brown people and those with serious mental illness feel when confronted by the police for any reason. They do not have the privilege that I have due to my white skin, education, and social status. The answer does not lie in simply sending a mental health professional along for the ride—and especially those whose very profession requires that we fight for social justice. Funding must be addressed; and funds should be diverted from policing to the communities so that they can seek solutions from within for social problems that have long been underfunded. Increasing funding to state and municipal police departments is a response that reflects a deep misunderstanding of the problem leading to a poorly conceived part of the bill. Funds are desperately needed now to address social issues without police involvement.

This bill is a beginning, not an end. It is laudable in many ways, but it is imperfectly thought out in others. I urge passage of the bill with amendments.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments.


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