

Dear Members of the Senate and House,

My name is Lauren Merriam and I am a resident of Cheshire, CT. As a citizen, spouse of a Walingford law enforcement officer, and mother to three young children, I write to you today to express my staunch opposition to LCO No 3471, a piece of legislation that will hamper law enforcement efforts across Connecticut. It robs police officers of the same Constitutional Rights extended to citizens across the nation. It is misguided and in need of reevaluation.

Like most of my neighbors, I am dismayed at the scarcity of respect, support, and protections extended to police officers in your proposed reforms. While there is always room for improvement in policing, the proposed legislation has far too many flaws that will ultimately diminish the effectiveness of our police officers. Of the many concerns, three, in particular, stand out and demand immediate attention, and reconsideration.

Those concerns are:

(1) **Due Process for all police officers:** Fair and equitable process under the law. The appeal processes afforded to police officers have been in place for generations. They deserve to maintain the right to appeal given to all of our public servants.

(2) **Qualified Immunity:** Qualified Immunity is critical in law enforcement. Qualified Immunity has always balanced the interest of all by holding public officials responsible when they exercise their power irresponsibly, and the protection from liability when they act reasonably. Qualified Immunity is extended to all public employees who act reasonably and in compliance with the rules and regulations of their respective departments, not just police officers. Qualified Immunity protects all public employees, as well as their municipalities, from frivolously unrealistic lawsuits. If this is stripped from police officers, the safety of our officers and the community in which they protect will be stripped with it. It will provoke a massive wave of retirements, and resignations of the most qualified and professional police officers we have as the risk of being sued, or incriminated for just performing their job will be too high. As a spouse of a law enforcement officer, this risk alone could destroy what our family has worked so hard to protect, and build.

As Connecticut residents, we know better than anyone how much we need the police after horrendous incidents - like the Sandy Hook school tragedy. We do not want our police officers to hesitate should they have to respond to another active shooter, another domestic violence incident, or even another home invasion. Last year, the CT State Police used force only 0.02% in all interactions with the public. Taking away qualified immunity for police will only hurt the residents of Connecticut as our police will no longer operate as effectively as they have been - they will hesitate and perhaps, choose to look the other way rather than put themselves, their families, and everything they've worked for at risk to be frivolously sued.

Additionally, after witnessing all the vile, threatening, and discriminatory language that has been proclaimed about police officers over the past two (2) months, there is no doubt that the flood gates would be open to many civil lawsuits against police. The rate at which police officers could be sued could put the state at a halt as all the anti-police rhetoric has now empowered society to disrespect laws, and the police officers that are trying to enforce them.

Why not attempt to enforce the other parts of this bill which would protect the citizens of CT? Police officers are citizens of CT as well.

(3) **Police Officer Standards and Training Council:** The composition of this council must include rank-and-file police officers. If you're going to regulate law enforcement, up to and including termination, you must understand law enforcement. The same way doctors oversee doctors, lawyers oversee lawyers, teachers oversee teachers, law enforcement should oversee law enforcement. It would be completely irresponsible otherwise to include anyone without any law enforcement experience.

I truly hope Connecticut does not create another tragedy responding to this tragedy by adopting legislation without proper thought and input from those who will be impacted directly. I remind you that those who protect and serve communities across Connecticut are some of the most sophisticated, qualified, and educated law enforcement officials in the nation. I am proud of what my spouse does to positively impact our community and state each day he puts on his uniform and goes to work. I implore you to reevaluate and amend LCO No 3471 so as to treat the men and women in law enforcement with the respect, dignity, and the support they deserve.

Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

Lauren Merriam