

Testimony in support of the Police Accountability Draft Bill for Special Legislative Session 2020
submitted by Maggie Goodwin LCSW (retired) West Haven CT.

I am speaking in favor of the bill and particularly in support of Section 18 requiring police departments to study the use of social workers to handle some of the police calls either by themselves or with a police(peace) officer.

I have worked in and supervised social workers in home based clinical programs, crisis intervention services and domestic violence programs in my career in rural, suburban and urban areas. One thing I know is there are very few instances of any social workers accidentally or intentionally **killing** a parent or partner of an abuser or **strangling or shooting** a mental health or drug addicted client or **beating up** a family member while removing their children because of neglect and abuse. Also rarely does a suicide or homicide actually happen while a social worker is responding to a mobile crisis call for a suicidal or an out of control mental health client. **Social workers don't kill, strangle or shoot people while doing their job.** I think the police can do that too. We just need to help show them the way. I suggest that one of the things social workers have "going for us" is **we do not have a gun as part of our job. That alone reduces the risk of someone dying greatly during a social work intervention.** While the police may be present at some of these interventions usually the role of the police officer is to support the safety of the citizens and the social worker and the social worker is in charge and is the leader of the team. The situations I described happen in people's homes and are some of the most emotionally charged situations in any person's life. The social worker as the leader of the team, sets the tone, and very importantly **remember does not have a gun.** Social workers are trained to help and to deescalate. They are trained to look for the underlying issues (ie lack of money, resources, housing, racism, language barriers, trauma, stress, medical issues etc.)as well as evaluate the current conflict. Even without services to offer to address these underlying issues, social workers **don't shoot or strangle people** and are usually able to deescalate the situation and address the presenting issues and get the job done.(I can only imagine what social workers could do if they had resources to offer citizens that might address the underlying issues). I and workers I have supervised, have together with the police (or without) are able to calm a conflict, negotiate the removal of weapons from the home or separate the children and other family members as prescribed. **No physical contact is allowed** and violence and further violence is usually prevented and citizens go to the hospital or treatment or to another living situations and **no one dies.** A good DCF worker or Mobil Crisis Social worker is striving to help people help themselves and they don't even consider using violence or weapons to get that job done They will tell you also I am sure **it is not easy but it is the job.**

Because of these experiences and observations, I think social workers need to be a strong voice in eradicating the white supremacy, institutionalized racism and militarization of policing in Ct. I believe that social workers need to be working in collaboration with the police in the community and social workers need to be involved in training police officers on assessment, de-escalation and demilitarization at the local and state level starting immediately. Independent social workers(hired by and working for state agencies, community based groups and nonprofit and mental health organizations) need to be available to train, model and collaborate in handling potentially stressful situations in both investigating a reported a crime and/or take the lead in situations when a citizen is simply requesting help or support. I think many stressful situations can be handled by social workers leading the intervention, supported by the police when necessary and having resources available to alleviate and address the citizen's underlying issues and problems. A police presence can be used to provide support and safety and to help clients realize that it is important for them to negotiate calmly and in good faith. The **police role is to keep the peace** while the situation is being resolved. I believe social workers ought to be available for collaboration and training especially as we begin our journey to a more humane place in the Ct justice system. We need to collaborate with and train police, corrections officers and school systems on how to listen and help while maintaining the peace and deescalating a situation without violence.

As many parents and teachers have counseled their children, social workers would counsel police and other professionals **"to use your words not your hands"** by training as well as by example in their actual independent presence in the daily policing system. For this and other needed system

changes, **major state and federal funding for community advocacy and oversight efforts, community based agencies, nonprofits and relevant state agencies staffing is need to be provided for social workers to work with Peace Officers(police).**

I am old and I know it is a "long arch to justice". I see the Ct legislation on policing reform as a first step in a big change that hopefully will put limits on the militarization of the police and support a dialogue with the community about what is needed to really move forward in changing the Ct justice system. While we work to realign our societal priorities and address racism and social justice issues, I want social workers to be in the dialogue suggesting practical steps to attain our common goals **of Equality, Justice and Peace.**

I think social workers in Ct support this bill and are willing to do what we can to facilitate change and **be** the change we want to see. I strongly believe that this Police Accountability Draft Bill is a good first step and I support it. Specifically, I think it is essential to **include and fund Section 18** requiring police departments and state police to study the use of social workers to handle some police calls either by themselves or with a police officer. I believe **police need to learn from and collaborate with community based independent social workers in our joint effort to protect and serve, keep the peace and help all CT citizens live their best lives.**