

July 17, 2020

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

My name is Mary Bugbee, and I am a resident of Manchester, CT, where on April 2nd of this year, a regional SWAT team that included two members of the Manchester Police Department, Sergeant Shawn Krom and Officer David Williams, killed 27-year old Jose Soto. The fact that these officers remain on the force is deeply disturbing and morally unjustifiable, and I support efforts to increase police accountability so officers like them are stripped of their badges and weapons. I support many of the provisions within the draft Police Accountability Bill (LCO #3471) as a first step toward greater police accountability; however, there are multiple provisions within this bill that require changes before I would support it in its entirety.

In Sections 33-35, the current language does not go far enough. We don't just need a new inspector general position to investigate police use of force and DOC custodial deaths, we also need an independent prosecutor.

In Sections 1 through 4 and Section 15, the current language grants the police the authority to police themselves in the certification and decertification process. This language should be amended to create an independent body to be in charge of these processes, because police should not, and cannot, police themselves.

Section 7 calls for required implicit bias training. Research shows that implicit bias training does not reduce police brutality or significantly change police behavior. Thus, I do not support the inclusion of mandatory implicit bias training unless it is budget neutral.

In Section 18, the current language has police departments evaluating whether social workers would be useful to replace them for some functions. Because police have a conflict of interest in making this call, the language should be amended so that an independent body determines this.

In regards to body-worn cameras (Sections 19 and 20), research shows that these *do not/cannot* reduce police violence and increase police accountability unless they are accompanied by adequate policies that provide true accountability for police. Without proper policies in place, these devices can easily transform into dangerous surveillance tools on communities. The appropriation of funds for reimbursement to municipalities for the purchase of body worn cameras will be a waste of state resources should this bill not contain detailed policies in place governing the use of these cameras nor contain provisions that make it possible to hold officers accountable for what is captured by these cameras (or for misusing them/abusing them).

While passing LCO 3471 with amendments is a first step toward greater police accountability, significantly more work is needed to solve the crisis of racist, violent, and militarized policing that plagues our entire nation (and state) and disproportionately impacts Black Americans. We need to transform from a punitive, carceral society to one where we focus on constructing a better world for us all to live and thrive. This necessarily involves policy characterized by substantial divestment from policing so that we can reinvest in our communities. For too long, elected officials have allowed police budgets, including the budget of the Connecticut State Police, to siphon away resources from important social services and public goods that ensure strong, safe, and healthy communities, such as education, health and mental health services, public transit, and affordable housing. Now is the time to reverse this shameful trend.

Sincerely,

Mary Bugbee
Manchester, CT