

To: Members of the Judiciary Committee

From: Michele Voigt, Greenwich, CT

Re: In **Support** of H.B. 3471

Date: July 16, 2020

Dear Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Ranking Members Kissel and Rebimbas, and Distinguished Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Michele Voigt.

I am a survivor of gun violence with a professional background in community based social services and rehabilitation. For two years, I have volunteered supporting survivors of gun violence in Connecticut. I am testifying today in favor of the Police Reform Bill # 3471 because I believe this bill can and will save lives. I also believe it is an initial step to restore community trust by increasing accountability and training of those whom swear to “protect and serve”.

Through my work with survivors and their families, I have become acutely aware of how lives can be altered by the actions and decisions of police officers.

I have been supporting Jennifer Lawlor, mother of Emily Todd, who was murdered in Bridgeport CT in December of 2018. Emily was a bright light. A local Bethel girl with a big heart whom always saw the best in everyone.

Emily was among Bethel High School’s Class of 2011. She attended Western Connecticut State University in Danbury before graduating in 2016 from Lesley University in Cambridge, Mass., with a degree in expressive arts therapy.

Emily worked as a therapeutic recreational assistant at St. John Paul II Center in Danbury. She dedicated herself to helping patients with dementia. Her kind and loving nature will forever live in the hearts and minds of all those who knew her. Emily was an empathetic, creative, and nurturing soul.

Eight days prior to her death, Emily called 911 for help. She reported that the man who ultimately ended up murdering her was sending her text messages threatening to kill himself and that he had a gun. The 911 call lasted an hour and fifteen (15) minutes. I along with Jennifer Lawlor and her sisters have listened to the recording of this call. It is agonizing to hear Emily’s sincere care and concern for this man she had just recently met. During the call the 911 operator berated Emily Todd, belittled her, and asked her to continue to try and lure the man to meet her. (November 30, 2018)

The police located the suicidal suspect within hours and a high speed pursuit ensued. It was shortly called off as witnessed on police radio at 6:25 PM as a BPD lieutenant said “if he’s going to commit 42, he’s going to commit 42”. For clarification, one of the Bridgeport PD 10 - codes is 10-42, used for a suicidal person/suicide. Basically saying, if he’s going to kill himself, he is going to kill himself.

The Bridgeport PD never followed up after the 911 call or the high speed pursuit despite knowing the identity and whereabouts of the subject. I can not help but suspect that the officers involved in that pursuit and their lieutenant did not care about his suicide threat due to the color of his skin.

Had the police department followed up, Emily Todd would be alive today. How does a mother live with that? How many mothers here in Connecticut are asked to live with the death of a child due to police action or inaction? How does Jennifer Lawlor receive justice and create positive change to protect others when “qualified / discretionary / municipality” immunity protects the police department from all civil liability.

I ask for your support of this bill and most importantly **Ss 41 Civil Cause of Action Against Certain Police Officers** and I ask that the effective date be retroactive.

In order to correct systemic injustice and increase trust with our black and brown communities you must allow the aggrieved and violated the right to seek civil justice not from an effective date of October 1, 2020 going forward but retroactive three (3) years to October 1, 2017. The same period of time as the statute of limitations for a civil suit in this legislation.

We know justice serves more than the victims. It creates change.

H.B. 3471 has lifesaving potential for people like Emily Todd.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

Michele Voigt  
Greenwich, CT