



# Glastonbury Police Officers' Association

PO Box 637 – Glastonbury, CT 06033

Thursday, July 16, 2020

I respectfully address the judiciary committee on behalf of the Glastonbury Police Officers Association representing the 67 members who proudly protect and serve the town of Glastonbury. Our organization cannot sit idly by while such a clearly damaging initiative is underway, and we stand in adamant objection to the proposed bill currently being discussed on police accountability and reform (LCO #3471).

We write this letter to all of you coming from the variety of our positions. We write to you as police officers who have seen the job devolve more than evolve due to overextension of duties and ratification of complicated and hindering law and policy. We write to you as dispatchers who are overworked and often forgotten acting as the link between the growing turmoil within our society and a responding police force facing that danger. We write to you as police instructors teaching incumbent officers who are becoming increasingly overwhelmed by the demands. We write to you as a Field Training Officers responsible for acclimating, assessing, and training new officers in the field who are more and more nervous to start their careers and carry out their duties based on the current climate. We write to you as union executive board members who represent an increasingly anxious membership in an increasingly unsupportive time where pay, benefits, pension, and healthcare are being stripped away along with basic protections to do the job. We write to you as citizens of the State of Connecticut and residents of the cities and towns within. We write to you as sons and daughters, husbands and wives, mothers and fathers. We write to you as people just like you and those you serve, which many people forget when they see us in uniform.

The proposed bill in question is nothing short of terrifying, not only as a police officer but in all of our capacities as citizens living and working in this state. The bill is in clear response to the horrific incident occurring in Minneapolis where a fellow officer not only disobeyed law and policy but acted with such disregard for human life that it was difficult to watch. Because of that one officer, all of our badges were tarnished that day. The one promising result from that day was solidarity within our country. Never have we seen such an outcry in unity from all walks of life. Where in the past it may have been a debate, now minority populations and police officers, people from urban cities and rural towns, conservatives and democrats all came together to state the clear fact that this was wrong and that we as a people are better than that. The officer was promptly and rightfully fired and charges were filed. He was stripped of his badge which he failed to uphold and his actions were denounced by every police officer and police organization in the country to include the Fraternal Order of Police. This was our demonstration that behavior such as this cannot and will not be tolerated in our proud profession.

What happened in the aftermath was tumultuous to say the least, with positive change being overshadowed by those looking to prey and distort the agenda. Aggressive acts, violence, and destruction took over the media instead of less-enticing headlines of peaceful and positive movements and of good police/community relations such as the peaceful protest in our town and countless others around the state and country. In typical fashion, those looking for positive and reasonable change either remained silent or were drowned out by the aggressive, misinformed, angry, and loud. The result of this has led to a push for hasty police reform without research, consideration of all sides, consideration of the law, and consideration for public and police safety. This will absolutely have extraordinarily damaging effects on our current police profession,



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the future of our profession, and the communities we live and work in. As the bill stands now in its working form, it will surely lead to severe de-policing of communities, inability to hire and retain officers, and the increase of crime and disorder as officers become even more reluctant to become involved in responding to social disorder or even stay in the job at all.

Officers are scared, alone, and unsupported. This has grown from the increase of severe and uncontrolled scrutiny by the media should an act to control a volatile situation by the police be even slightly misconstrued. Where others get due process in a court of law, police officers who do not act perfectly in the eyes of our society get swift and unrelenting punishment in all aspects of their lives. That same society which casts judgement, however, is the one which demands action on crime and disorder, making calls to the police for anything from active violent situations to a minor dispute between neighbors over their property line. That same society fails to understand the true physical, mental, and emotional demand of the job of policing where we have to wear body armor to work and see horrific scenes with such regularity that it becomes numbing. That same society demands that we be always friendly, caring, service-oriented, and amusing and entertaining. We are expected to handle people locked out of their vehicle or remove a bat from their house while also engaging in unique efforts to engage with the public. That same society which needed us and thanked us just weeks before as frontline workers deserving of hazard pay during the COVID-19 crisis is now demanding our defunding and the curtailing of all protections and abilities needed to perform safely and effectively. Society has become self-proclaimed experts on everything pertaining to law enforcement from reading headlines and watching Live PD. The truth is that our job is ever-changing and it's difficult for even veteran officers to keep up with the amount of new policies, procedures, laws, court cases, crime trends, and initiatives; we therefore question the ability of anyone not even remotely attached to the profession to truly understand. We do not expect praise and take on our duties for the betterment of society. We do not expect the public to understand our profession fully however it becomes difficult when that society demands quick change to policy without vetting the need for it or the repercussions associated with it. Representatives of our state such as yourselves therefore need to take the responsibility of fully understanding before forcing through something as damaging as this bill in the name of appeasement.

Of greatest concern to us are items within the bill such as the elimination of qualified immunity, consideration for police officers to carry personal liability insurance, and the blanket stance on curtailing use of force which are extraordinarily short-sighted and clear examples of the lack of understanding of the policing field by those who have never had to go into work and resolve actively violent or chaotic situations. Additionally, this presents such a personal risk to officers both to their safety and their livelihood that most will seriously consider if getting involved is ever worth the risk. Furthermore, with regard to qualified immunity specifically, the proposed elimination is in stark contrast to a recent CT Supreme Court case (*Borelli v. Renaldi*) which upheld such qualified immunity with the court stating such immunity "reflects a value judgment that—despite injury to a member of the public—the broader interest in having government officers and employees free to exercise judgment and discretion in their official functions, unhampered by fear of second-guessing and retaliatory lawsuits, outweighs the benefits to be had from imposing liability for that injury."

Other areas of concern within this bill include items such as the elimination of "military" equipment. Such prohibition implies to the public that officers are an oppressive force engaged in warfare when that is not



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the case. Instead it reduces the ability of officers to safely and appropriately respond to those extreme situations everyone has so quickly erased from their memory such as the many school shootings we said we never would forget. Items such as the demanding of mental fitness-for-duty evaluations undermine any empathy for officers in need and the work done by so many organizations who are just now starting to destigmatize officers seeking help for depression, anxiety, or PTSD. Officer mental health and police suicide has been shown to be a serious concern. An initiative in such form, however, will result in officers failing to provide honest self-evaluations and discourage officers from seeking help when needed as it will now have the attached the risk of job loss or being judged by their coworkers for a private matter. Items such as pushing body worn cameras and civilian review boards insinuate the false narrative that there is a widespread problem with police misconduct in our state and suggest it should be overseen by that same society who has not made a thorough effort to understand the complexity of our job. Items such as the elimination of consent searches or the consideration of the elimination of pre-textual motor vehicle stops not only go against long-standing Supreme Court cases but limit the ability of officers to effectively engage in crime control. Not only will this result in the loss of seizures of harmful drugs and weapons, but it even more commonly reduces the ability of officers to conduct positive proactive policing in all areas from severe crimes to DUI enforcement. Finally, a variety of other items from eliminating chokeholds, which were never part of initial or ongoing training, to drug screening for officers insinuate that this is another widespread problem and undermine police officer credibility in favor of placating an upset audience demanding control of a now seemingly out-of-control profession.

Truly the bill in its entirety is a severe slap in the face of all those who serve; vilifying our state's heroes and painting them with a broad brush based solely on the uniform they wear. Not only has hatred toward the police been allowed or even encouraged, but the mere support of police in our society is even denounced as racist or fascist. In a document developed over only a few weeks, the proposed changes aim to control law enforcement and overwrite policy and procedure based on court cases which have been properly discussed and considered for years. From this aggressive controlling and handcuffing of our state's police officers comes severe de-policing in a time when we are seeing unprecedented social disorder. We write this to you a day after the Glastonbury Police responded to its first drive-by shooting incident in a widely assumed "safe suburban town". Communities already in dire need of police presence will certainly feel these effects, which have already started. Look to the intensifying crime and violence trends in major cities within our country and state to understand what happens when we enact restrictive policy or fail to provide law enforcement with the most basic of resources and self-protection. We also encourage you to review recent activity such as that in New York City where protestors from minority communities stood in opposition of such policies aimed at taking away and stifling police services in a time when we need them most, especially in impoverished areas. The vast majority of our communities both want and need police services but they are not being listened to or even asked. Instead, these proposals aim to appease the outspoken few with a bill that will consequently do irreparable damage. Finally, an unquestionably wrong act occurring a thousand miles away has led to a scattered plan of attack on every conceivable facet of law enforcement without any research or consultation of experts equipped to make positive and forward moving suggestions.

We as a society expect a great deal from our police officers. To be ready and willing to handle the most difficult of situations in the most difficult of conditions and to do so perfectly under fear of administrative, criminal, and civil penalty as well as unrelenting backlash by the media, both social and traditional. With the



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passage of this bill we as a society are now asking even more for even less protection and support. While the bill has portions aimed at recruitment, we ask you, who from any walk of life would want to take on this responsibility? Who would want to stay a police officer or become a police officer and risk everything in their life including their life? Would you? Would you want your children or loved ones to do this job?

The proposed bill only serves to solidify a definitive knowledge that officers, while asked to carry out the laws established by the legislature, have no support to do so from that same government. Criminal laws prohibiting actions, even minor ones, are passed and we expect police to enforce them. However, when they do so at the direction of that government, police are questioned on their action by a society that agreed upon such laws. An overworked court and correction system overturns police efforts, again making it appear that law enforcement is the sole oppressive problem. And that same government which directed us originally seemingly turns its back by attempting to enact such a bill. This bill clearly shows that officers are expendable and the scapegoat for a society which would rather place the weight and blame of widespread institutional racism, inequality, and social injustice square on the backs of the men and women willing to give their lives for the betterment of that society. No reform is being demanded as strongly within any other area of the criminal justice system. No one is protesting to truly integrate schools and communities. No one is looking at equal and fair access to all government services, education, housing, nutrition, and wellness. Meaningful and positive discussion and change is instead replaced by finger pointing at our nation's law enforcement.

This bill is dangerous for police officers, but I fear that it is even more dangerous for the communities which will without a doubt suffer from its effects, especially those which are already in dire need of defense against violence and crime within. The calls for service, however, continue to roll in from people demanding we do something about issues big and small within their communities. In the same breath that our society and our government agree that police should be reformed and defunded with a reduced presence and a refocusing of priorities away from minor offenses, they also demand that the police take action on noise complaints due to fireworks.

We truly hope that you keep this letter in mind as you make your decisions going forward with the crafting and voting of this bill. We stand with many others in the field and in our communities firmly against it in its entirety as it stands. We support open discussions towards meaningful advancement of our profession through partnership with researchers, universities, and organizations equipped to make those recommendations. For the safety of our fellow officers and for the safety of our fellow citizens of the state, we implore you to oppose the current bill. We should all be working together for advancement of policing, not the eradication of it. In the words of Robert Kennedy, "Every society gets the kind of criminal it deserves. What is equally true is that every community gets the kind of law enforcement it insists on."

Respectfully,

Ofc. Brian J Barao

Union Secretary

Glastonbury Police Officers Association