

To the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Peter Brander, and I live in Marlborough, Connecticut. I am writing to express my fierce opposition to An Act Concerning Police Accountability. I am employed as a Police Detective with the Glastonbury Police Department, and have been employed as a police officer for a total of eight years. I served as a patrol officer for nearly four years, and I have been a criminal investigator/detective for almost five years. Within my police department I am responsible for training veteran officers and new recruits alike in the subjects of firearms, use of force, Taser, handcuffing, and arrest and control tactics. I am also trained in Crisis Intervention techniques, a specialty involving the response to individuals experiencing mental health crises. Additionally, I serve as a tactical operator on a regional SWAT team which is responsible for responding to high risk situations in ten Connecticut towns. Our team is highly trained and is one of the most active tactical teams in the state. I have a Bachelor's degree in Sociology from Eastern Connecticut State University, I served in the Army Reserve for 12 and have been deployed several times. I have considerable knowledge in a wide breadth of subject matter relative to the amount of time I've spent in this field, and therefore, feel qualified to speak on this matter.

I care deeply about my community, state, and country, and I am very passionate about my profession—the profession of helping others and protecting those who have been victimized. For me, law enforcement is not something I “fell into”. I worked very hard to achieve this lifelong goal, and I strive to earn the title of being a police officer every day—I am not the exception, those I have the privilege of working with are just as qualified as I am.

The nationwide backlash to the abhorrent death of George Floyd at the hands of a disgrace of a police officer shook this country to its core. I too was shocked when I saw what happened in Minneapolis. That's not who we as cops are and that's not what we do. Everyone agrees that some sort of change is necessary, but I can speak for myself and every single law enforcement officer in the state of Connecticut when I say that this bill will surely do exponentially more harm to both the police and public as a whole, than to protect the rights of people who interact with the police. In no confusing terms, this bill completely seeks to persecute the police for the disgraceful actions of a few, and it is completely unacceptable. In reading the proposed bill as it stands, I have attached very real scenarios that I have experienced myself, or have firsthand knowledge of in order to show how outrageous these proposals are.

Justified Use of Deadly Physical Force and Chokeholds—as current state law (which mirrors federal law) currently states a use of force by a police officers has to be judged from the officer's perspective at the time of the incident, with the facts and circumstances known to the officer at the time, without the benefit of 20/20 hindsight (on the part of a jury). Under the proposed bill it is only a matter of time until a police officer will have to decide in the midst of a deadly force encounter, whether or not they will have to kill a violent suspect and risk being charged with murder, or being killed in the line of duty so their spouse can at least collect their pension and leave their family with some security after they are murdered.

1. the person upon whom deadly physical force was used possessed or appeared to possess a deadly weapon,
2. the officer engaged in reasonable de-escalation measures before using deadly physical force, and
3. any of the officer's conduct led to an increased risk of the situation that led up to the use of such force.

The bottom line is that the term “unarmed” is not synonymous with “not dangerous”. Myriad police officers and citizens have been murdered by “unarmed” criminals. In 2011 a Wethersfield police officer conducted an investigative stop of an individual suspected of committing burglaries. During the encounter the suspect

attacked the officer, fought the officer for his gun, and tried to strangle him from behind. The officer was forced to shoot this “unarmed” suspect so he would not be murdered at the bare hands of this violent criminal, resulting in the death of the suspect. As the bill is currently written, this officer would have to make the conscious decision to either die or kill the suspect and be tried for murder. The current Connecticut general statute regarding use of force is appropriately restrictive, and any further change to it is outrageously dangerous to both police and citizens.

Prohibition on Consent Searches—consent searches are a valuable tool for furthering a police officer’s roadside investigation. I, and my coworkers, have located numerous items of contraband and weapons enroute to, or coming from a crime, absent search warrant level probable cause. These weapons or drugs may have remained on the streets and have been used in robberies, serious assaults, or murders, or have caused the plague of opioid overdoses the state has been battling for some time. Here is a list of items and circumstances myself or my fellow officers have seized as a result of consent based roadside searches (yes, in quiet Glastonbury):

- 9mm pistol possessed by an individual currently on probation for a felony.

- 2 AR-15 rifles with loaded magazines, as well as illegally possessed body armor and marijuana.

- 5 bundles of fentanyl laced heroin possessed by an individual on parole for a violent crime, enroute to a Narcotics Anonymous meeting to sell said drugs to those trying to recover from their addictions.

- Numerous samurai swords and knives possessed by an individual who was operating a vehicle with an underage female passenger who had a current protective order against said suspect.

- A realistic facsimile semi-automatic pistol under the front seat of a driver who planned to use the firearm in the robbery of another individual.

These are only cases that I have partaken in or have firsthand knowledge of. But they happen every day across the state, and this is why you want the police to be proactive and inquisitive—to protect the public.

Prohibition on Police Using Military Equipment—this has been a hot-button issue across the country because equipment used by police departments often resembles that used by the military, or is obtained through the 1033 program. I won’t go into semantics and nomenclature such as the difference between an AR-15 rifle and an M-4 rifle, it’s a moot point. However, so is this proposal. Allowing police departments to obtain used military equipment in lieu of purchasing it saves taxpayers thousands of dollars. I am still waiting for an explanation from lawmakers that is not based in emotion as to why the police should not possess armored vehicles. As for “military style” equipment and weapons, the answer is simple. In the event that an active shooter is on a rampage at your child’s school, wouldn’t you want nothing short of a tank going in to that school to stop the killing and to rescue your children? Suppose your neighbor is selling fentanyl out of their house and protects the proceeds from their illegal activities with firearms. It is the duty of the police to protect the public by putting an end to this activity, and we cannot do that when we are outgunned and out armored. It is simple as that. By outlawing the police from having the tools they need, you’re telling violent criminals that it’s okay for them to set up shop and do what they want. Police are not expected to meet force with equal force. They are expected to overcome a suspect’s force in order to safely take that suspect into custody. Without this type of live saving equipment, the following are real scenarios (or have happened):

- Victims, hostages, and bystanders cannot be safely rescued and transported to safety at the scene of an active shooter or an armed barricaded individual in a residential neighborhood.

- Officers will not have adequate armored protection from gun fire when approaching a dangerous scene.

-Officers will be outgunned without long rifles at the scene where criminals are known to have assault rifles.

-Tactical officers will not be able to safely approach a dangerous residence where there are narcotics and/or firearms using night vision in order to use the darkness and surprise, ensuring the safety of officers and the suspect(s).

-Officers will be limited with their less lethal options with which they can safely take a violent suspect into custody.

Civil Cause of Action Against Certain Police Officers—simply put, the removal or modification of qualified immunity for police officers will be a gigantic deterrent to police officers doing their jobs for fear of frivolous litigation resulting in financial ruin. This will single handedly change the way police do their jobs forever. Anecdotally speaking, we have already seen the drastic results of a lack of proactive policing in New York City. Since the removal of proactive anti-crime units, violent crimes have spiked in one of the safest cities in the world by up to 250%. This is to the point that leaders in minority communities have petitioned the NYPD to bring these units back in order to engage in crime suppression activities. This one example is something that is happening at this very moment. Making it easier to sue police officers civilly will not protect citizens; it will hurt them in their hour of greatest need of police assistance.

Representatives, I implore you, do not vote to pass this bill. Not only is this bill a “solution” to a problem that does not exist in Connecticut, (at least to the extent that it does in other parts of the country), it will severely hurt citizens who have been truly victimized by hardened criminals. It should be noted that in the course of this writing I responded to the drive by shooting of a woman and her toddler son (again, yes, in Glastonbury). During the course of this investigation, I gained a witness’s consent to search her vehicle for the blood of a two year old shooting victim in order to further the investigation as fast as possible. As mentioned, the scenarios I’ve outlined in this letter happen on a daily basis. This is what is at stake of this bill is passed as written. Thank you for your time.

Respectfully Submitted,

Peter R. Brander