

Judiciary Committee testimony for Draft LCO #3471 An Act Concerning Police Accountability
From Robert Nussbaum, Essex, CT

The proposed bill represents an important set of steps forward, and I support it. Having said that, I would add that we need to recognize that the police are doing what “we” want them to do. If we want change, we need to tell them to stop “broken windows-style” policing, to stop targeting low-level infractions with intensive, invasive and aggressive law enforcement.

Regarding training, it is important to address *who* is doing the training. If it is done by people (especially private contractors) who emphasize military-style approaches, and a “warrior” mentality, it will be counter-productive. Also, while officer safety is very important, we need to avoid the approach that every interaction can turn deadly if the officers aren’t prepared to use lethal force at any moment. The training should include better knowledge of the laws, especially as they relate to crowd control, demonstrations, and other activities where free speech and public congregating are involved.

The goals of police reform should include reducing funding for and use of SWAT teams, especially for drug enforcement, for militarized crowd control tactics, and especially for the acquisition of military or military-style equipment.

We should be eliminating wherever possible, the kinds of situations where we are asking the police to be the first point of contact for solving community and family problems. There is no reason for the police to be the gatekeepers to social services. Social service resources don’t need to be and should not be attached to and under the control of police departments. School resource officers should be eliminated or refocused. If they have to be present, it is to safeguard the school and the students, not to replace the school staff as the agent of school discipline.

For these reforms to work they need to be tied to other major reforms, e.g. dialing back the “War on Drugs” (the bill to legalize marijuana *needs to pass*; and we need to move from the criminal model of dealing with drug use to public health and harm-reduction model); e.g. more community funding for social services (so that we can avoid/eliminate the use of the police to deal with situations involving mental disabilities or psychiatric illnesses...these should not be framed as police issues. “Racially neutral enforcement” should not become a code word, like “colorblind”...for example, being “neutral” on vehicular infractions still punishes those least able to take care of their vehicles or pay any fines meted out.

In summary, we shouldn’t fool ourselves: a kinder, gentler, better trained and more diverse war on the poor *is still a war on the poor.*