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Testimony of Rochelle Palache, Connecticut Political Director for 32BJ SEIU

Judiciary Committee:

July 17, 2020

LCO No. 3471 An Act Concerning Police Accountability

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Rochelle Palache, and I am the Connecticut political director for 32BJ SEIU. 32BJ is the largest building service union in the country representing workers from Boston to Florida. 5000 of our members live here in Connecticut. Our members are majority Black and Brown and most are essential workers. They are risking their health on the front lines of the COVID-19 pandemic while facing the harsh realities of systemic racism, including and especially in our policing.

In 1966 James Baldwin wrote an article titled “A Report from Occupied Territory” detailing police treatment of African Americans and how as a result police were viewed not as people who protect and serve but as an occupying force.ⁱ Multiple governmental commissions, dating from as far back as 1922 have documented and examined the discriminatory treatment experienced by African Americans in policing.ⁱⁱ Yet on March 13, 2020 Breonna Taylor, a medical worker, was killed in her own home during a no-knock raid.ⁱⁱⁱ On May 25, 2020 George Floyd died under the knee of a cop in Minneapolis,^{iv} triggering a nationwide movement for police accountability and demanding that the truth of the statement “Black Lives Matter” be recognized. We’ve known for a long time problem what the problem is, what we need now is action.

LCO No. 3471 presented before the committee today is a significant step on the right direction, it would provide for additional training for state police, require implicit bias training, encourage minority hiring, require display of the officer’s badge and name tag, permit municipalities to establish civilian review boards, require body worn and dashboard cameras, restrict chokeholds, create an inspector general, waive qualified/sovereign immunity among other positive changes. This is a substantial reform package and we hope that it is passed, however we believe that it could still be improved. Some of the most innovative approaches to policing in the bill are in section 12, they are limited to studies on requiring liability insurance, limiting traffic stops, and no-knock raids. We prefer the legislature to act on these issues now, as noted before we have had too many studies and task forces on this subject. We are also concerned with the shifting of the composition of the Police Officer Standards and Training Council, while we believe that law enforcement must play a role and should be consulted for their expertise, we do not believe that they should dominate the council.

We also recognize that this bill should be just the beginning of continuing efforts to dismantle systemic racism not only in our criminal justice system but also throughout our society. Our claims to be the “land of the free” ring hollow when we have the biggest prison population in the world and incarcerate more people per capita than China or Iran.^v We encourage legislators to consider and pass efforts to diminish the

problems caused by overcriminalization and overincarceration, and to support LCO No. 3471. Thank you.

ⁱ James Baldwin, *A Report from Occupied Territory*, THE NATION (July 11, 1966),

<https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/report-occupied-territory/>

ⁱⁱ Jill Lepore, *The History of the “RIOT” Report*, THE NEW YORKER (June 15, 2020), <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2020/06/22/the-history-of-the-riot-report>

ⁱⁱⁱ Richard A. Oppel Jr. and Derrick Bryson Taylor, *Here’s What You Need to Know About Breonna Taylor’s Death*, THE NEW YORK TIMES (July 9, 2020), <https://www.nytimes.com/article/breonna-taylor-police.html>

^{iv} <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/31/us/george-floyd-investigation.html>

^v American Psychological Association, *Incarceration Nation: The United States leads the world in incarceration. A new report explores why—and offers recommendations for fixing the system*, AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION (Oct. 2014), <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2014/10/incarceration>