



Testimony of  
**Sal Luciano, President  
Connecticut AFL-CIO**

Judiciary Committee  
July 17, 2020

***LCO 3471 An Act Concerning Police Accountability***

Good afternoon Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom and members of Judiciary Committee. My name is Sal Luciano and I am proud to serve as the President of the Connecticut AFL-CIO, a federation of hundreds of local unions representing more than 220,000 members in the private sector, public sector, and building trades. Our members live and work in every city and town in our state and reflect the diversity that makes Connecticut great. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today on LCO 3471 An Act Concerning Police Accountability.

No person of conscience can watch the video of George Floyd pleading for his life under the knee of a Minneapolis police officer and not understand that something is, and has been, deeply wrong in America. The death of George Floyd at the hands of Minneapolis police is a reminder that racism plays an insidious role in the daily lives of all working people of color. This is a labor issue because it is a workplace issue. It is also a community issue and unions are part of the community.

In the days following George Floyd's murder, the national AFL-CIO and a number of national union leaders called for police accountability. AFL-CIO President Richard Trumka, citing Labor's responsibility to engage and be part of a comprehensive solution, convened an emergency meeting of the federation's policy committee to create a police code of excellence to set a standard and exemplify the best models of police conduct in the nation.

President Trumka was joined in this effort by a number of other national leaders, including AFSCME President Lee Saunders, whose union is among those that represent police officers. AFSCME has a particularly long and proud tradition of championing social justice, understanding that civil rights, economic rights, human rights and workers' rights are all intertwined. Yet President Sanders has been unequivocal in his commitment that, "no collective bargaining agreement or law should be a shield for misconduct."

In Connecticut, we have also called for meaningful change. The Connecticut AFL-CIO's Executive Board passed a resolution at its June 19, 2020 meeting, supporting legislative efforts to enhance police accountability and recommitting our organization to advancing policies that dismantle 400-year old traditions of racial injustice. A copy of the resolution is attached to my testimony.

More specifically, the resolution calls on police union leaders to take the initiative to engage with justice advocates, as they did in 2016 and 2019, to proactively contribute to comprehensive policy solutions that put an end to police brutality, root out systemic racism, enhance transparency, foster positive, collaborative relationships between officers and the communities they're sworn to protect and remove officers who abuse their authority. The Connecticut AFL-CIO stands in solidarity with those who take such courageous steps to make meaningful change, including establishing zero tolerance policies for police officers who employ racism, discrimination, police brutality or any other action that jeopardizes

the public's trust and the elimination of provisions that delay justice for those who have suffered from police abuse of power.

The draft before you is a comprehensive and historic one that if passed, will significantly change the law enforcement landscape in this state. We applaud the Chairs and Ranking Members for your careful, courageous and deliberative efforts. Many of our affiliates support much of this proposal. Some of our affiliates have suggested that some provisions could be improved with further discussion and collaboration. Like any good policy, we hope the final result will reflect compromise.

While we embrace President Saunders words that "no collective bargaining agreement or law should be a shield for misconduct," we caution the Committee against attempts to coopt the vital and long overdue discussions of systemic racism to justify attempts to limit or abrogate workers' rights to collectively bargain. We oppose the forces of hate who seek to divide this state and this nation for their own personal and political gain at workers' expense. The protests that swept our state and our nation are about putting an end to police brutality. But they are also about combatting racial and economic inequality in the daily lives of all working people of color.

Beneath the three connected crises we now face—the coronavirus, mass unemployment and racial injustice—is the question of who gets seen and who gets heard. And, ultimately, who lives and who dies. Collective bargaining gives workers a collective voice to ensure they are heard and respected at work. Without collective bargaining, all workers, especially workers of color, are sent into unsafe workplaces by employers and a government that literally does not see them. Collective bargaining is one of the central vehicles by which we eradicate oppression and disparities in our workplaces. Economic justice is racial justice. Racial justice is economic justice. Collective bargaining is a key to making that a reality.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. We stand ready to assist you in any way that we can.



## **RESOLUTION CONDEMNING RACIAL INJUSTICE AND CALLING FOR CHANGES TO POLICE ACCOUNTABILITY AND POLICIES THAT PERPETUATE SYSTEMIC RACISM AND RACIAL INEQUALITIES**

**WHEREAS** no person of conscience can watch the video of George Floyd pleading for his life under the knee of a Minneapolis police officer and not understand that something is, and has been, deeply wrong in America; and

**WHEREAS** the protests that swept our state and our nation, precipitated by George Floyd's murder, are about putting an end to police brutality and dismantling a four-hundred year old paradigm of systemic racism that continues to play an insidious role in the daily lives of all working people of color; and

**WHEREAS** racism continues to affect people of color as evidenced by the fact that one in [ten](#) black men in his thirties is in prison or jail on any given day; one in six Latinos born in 2001 can expect to go to prison in their lifetime; Black people are more [likely](#) to be required to pay bail and are more likely to have higher bail; Black women [make](#) tens of thousands less than white men with the same education; Black workers continue to [face](#) higher unemployment rates, fewer job opportunities, lower pay, poorer benefits, and greater job instability; employers are more [likely](#) to consider white candidates with criminal records than black candidates with no such history; and in the middle of a pandemic, [evidence](#) suggests that black and Latino workers face much more economic and health insecurity from COVID-19 than white workers; and

**WHEREAS** issues of systemic racism are labor issues because they affect workers, the workplace and the communities in which our members live and work; and

**WHEREAS** the labor movement has a long tradition of fighting for civil rights, always linking workers' rights to civil rights, economic rights and human rights; and

**WHEREAS** the Connecticut AFL-CIO and its affiliates have already committed to becoming an anti-racist organization, as well as an organization that actively builds and prioritizes connection and trust with the community it serves; and

**WHEREAS** while some opportunistic, far right organizations are attempting to hijack this moment to attack collective bargaining rights, the Connecticut AFL-CIO remains committed to the belief that police officers and everyone who works for a living has the right to collective bargaining; so

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that in the depths of our pain, the Connecticut labor movement renews its commitment that peace is not the absence of conflict, but the presence of justice; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that we call on police union leaders to take the initiative to engage with justice advocates, as they have done previously in 2016 and 2019 to now proactively contribute to comprehensive policy solutions that put an end to police brutality, root out systemic racism, enhance transparency, foster positive, collaborative relationships between officers and the communities they're sworn to protect and remove officers who abuse their authority; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that we call on union leaders to espouse the words of AFSCME national president Lee Saunders, who wrote in a recent op-ed regarding the killing of George Floyd, "No union contract is or should be construed as a shield for misconduct or criminal behavior. In fact, the four officers in Minneapolis were fired the day after George Floyd was killed, and now they've all been charged," and;

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Connecticut AFL-CIO and its affiliates will stand in solidarity with police unions who take courageous steps to make meaningful change, including establishing zero tolerance policies for police officers who employ racism, discrimination, police brutality or any other action that jeopardizes the public's trust and the elimination of provisions that delay justice for those who have suffered from police abuse of power;

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Connecticut AFL-CIO endorses the AFL-CIO's national code of excellence, developed by national police unions and challenges all law enforcement officers to hold themselves to that standard, so that compassionate and law abiding police officers can be recognized for the positive contributions they make to their communities; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Connecticut AFL-CIO and its affiliates continue to march and advocate alongside our community and coalition partners, including, but not limited to Black Lives Matter, the General Assembly's Black and Puerto Rican Caucus and the NAACP to ensure the work of peaceful demonstration turns into enacted policy solutions; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the Connecticut AFL-CIO and its affiliates support legislative efforts to enhance police accountability, but will also work in coalition to advance policies that contribute to dismantling 400-year old traditions of racial inequities, including prioritizing budget investments that close gaps in housing, education, workforce training, job creation and fair revenue policies.

**BE IT FINALLY RESOVLED** that today, June 19, 2020, the 158<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the date President Abraham Lincoln signed legislation prohibiting slavery in the federal territories, effectively nullifying the Dred Scott decision, which held that black Americans could not be citizens, and the 155<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the date that news finally reached enslaved people in Galveston, Texas that President Lincoln had issued the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, we join with our black brothers and sisters to celebrate "Juneteenth," the abolition of slavery in the United States and also renew our commitment to eradicating racism once and for all.