

July 15, 2020

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee,

I am writing to submit testimony in support of **LCO #3471 An Act Concerning Police Accountability (AACPA)**.

I am a resident of Hamden, and work in the field of victim advocacy and social services. It is evident that policing in the United States carries a history of discriminatory and violent practices, particularly against Black people, indigenous people, people of color, and the LGBTQ community. Law enforcement officers in Connecticut are not exempt from this history, as evidenced by the number of BIPOC residents killed by police in recent years, and countless testimonies from BIPOC Connecticut residents who have shared their own experiences of violence, discrimination, and oppression at the hands of Connecticut police. In June 2020, the Hartford Courant reported that over the past 5 years, Connecticut law enforcement officers have killed 21 people. Accountability for law enforcement in Connecticut is long overdue.

As a state that prides ourselves in being a leader in quality social services, it is imperative that we prioritize social policies which are informed by a human rights framework. The AACPA will provide accountability for law enforcement officers who violate the rights of our citizens, and those who violate Connecticut laws.

Lastly, it is clear that law enforcement officers in Connecticut are tasked with responsibilities that span far beyond the scope of their training and expertise. I encourage legislators to examine ways to reallocate a portion of police funding to fund higher quality social services and to employ more social workers in schools, police departments, hospitals, and other community organizations, as well as changes in policies to stop criminalizing poverty. Various municipal and state laws in Connecticut contribute to the criminalization of poverty including: the cash bail system, felon disenfranchisement, banning loitering and panhandling, and forced evictions of homeless encampments. Providing high quality social services to those who need them, with more trained social workers to facilitate such services, will in and of itself reduce crime, because individuals won't be forced to resort to engaging in these life-sustaining, yet criminalized activities (panhandling, loitering, sleeping in public, trespassing to find a safe place to sleep, theft in order to have food to eat, etc) in order to survive.

Creating laws that hold police officers accountable for egregious racist, xenophobic, homophobic, and transphobic acts is the first step towards delivering justice to victims of police brutality and discrimination, and to families and loved ones of individuals who have died at the hands of Connecticut law enforcement officers. Reallocating law enforcement funding to fund greater social services and more social workers to facilitate such services will improve the lives of Connecticut residents, and help to reduce crimes. I urge you to support the passage of AACPA.

Thank you for your consideration,

Sarah Holmes

Hamden, CT