

Sarah Lombardo

Stonington Resident and Voter

An Act Pertaining to Police Accountability

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Good morning honorable legislators. My name is Sarah Lombardo, and I have worked in the mental health system with a Master's in Social Work for the past 11 years. I am writing to inform you of how needed social workers are to work hand in hand with the police force. Shortly after I began my journey in 2009, I found myself working for the Southeastern Council on Addiction and Drug Dependence.

There, I went into prisons three times a week as part of a transitional case management program. We helped ease the transition from a jail environment to one where job assistance, sobriety reinforcement, and housing could all be an option.

We were there to help once the clients were ending their sentence, but what about before we got there? What if there had been someone at the crime scene. Someone called into the situation from the beginning, to listen, to calm, to understand the troubled individual's needs because the professional had been training for that moment from day one of grad school. This my fellow citizens, would be the social worker.

The social worker is key in this situation because he or she will find programs: counseling, treatment, education, housing ; creating in time, overall healing so this person does not go through years in prison that may often repeat itself. With recidivism rates as high as they are the state would be saving money if they invested more into staffing social workers in the police departments of each town. In a study of recidivism within the Connecticut Department of Correction it was found that within 5 years of offenders' release 79% were rearrested, 69% were convicted of a new crime, and 50% were returned to prison with a new crime. Programs linked by social workers to offenders can help. For example, in Rhode Island, after a Tier Four treatment program only 17% of offenders repeated criminal behavior. It's true that a few social workers are starting to become employed in police departments in the state, but we need more. Right now, 1 social worker is assigned 25 towns. I think you'd have to agree that with as much crime that goes on, there's no way one person can do it all.

A social worker is a valuable asset to a police force. A social worker did not just talk about feelings all day for a year. A Master's in Social Work is a 60 credit degree, many more credits than other Masters' degrees that are often 30 credits. A social worker knows about how the brain works. A social worker knows about what to do when someone gets triggered , techniques to lower stress and talk a person to a calmer state. Through it all a social worker uses emotional intelligence to guide words and actions.

Take it from one of those social workers in the field. Social workers can handle the job. Once you employ them, you'll pave the way to a safer state on the road to healing and lower recidivism rates.