

July 21, 2020

Dear Judiciary Committee,

I was unable to submit my testimony for the hearing this weekend, but I am hoping you are still able to accept comments. I am a resident of New Haven, CT. I hold a Bachelor of Science in Community Health from the University of Northern Colorado, a Master of Divinity (professional degree for ministry) from Yale Divinity School, and a Master of Social Work from the Wurzweiler School of Social Work at Yeshiva University in New York City. As a result of my training and background, I have a special expertise both in community wellness and behavioral change for individuals and communities. Please allow me to share some of the reasons that this expertise in particular leads me to support the proposed legislation (LCO 3471):

- **Legislation is one tool of behavioral change** (this is the same reason more communities are making face masks mandatory), especially as it constrains particular behaviors. I know we can all agree on the fact that legislation changes behavior because if we did not believe that to be the case, the proposed legislation would not be so intensely debated. Training alone, as some suggested during the weekend listening session, is an insufficient modality for behavioral change. The proposed legislation includes and moves beyond training, making it a more effective set of tools.
- **In any system, groups that hold formal power tend to have least motivation toward behavioral change.** There are many forms of power, but those serving on police forces have what is called *positional power*, a form of formal power. Even those who testified against the proposed legislation have acknowledged the need for change. However, relying on “good faith” measures is insufficient in a system where a group’s power is backed by state. In this case, change can only effectively be motivated by state restrictions on that power and intentional direction of that power toward desired ends.
- **Accountability is key to successful behavioral change, especially systemic change.** Accountability enhances professional practice in crisis situations rather than limiting options. Over the weekend, several policing professionals reported during the listening session that they would be less likely to use force if, for example, they no longer had qualified immunity. The implication is that this would put the public at greater risk (including an embedded implication that use of force is not itself a risk to the public). This implication is highly misleading. Any of us who have done crisis work in absence of the ability to use a gun know that slower, more careful work leads to better outcomes in the vast majority of situations. Accountability is protective of public safety. It may not prevent all injury, but it highly increases the chances that everyone will make it out alive.

This legislation is well-designed to produce its desired outcomes from the standpoint of behavioral change research, and I believe it is an important and solid start to enhancing community wellness by shifting from “law enforcement at any cost” to justice-oriented practices rooted in mutual well-being.

Warmly,
Sierra-Marie Gerfao