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Public Testimony for Bill Number 3741

An Act Concerning Police Accountability

Dear Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Senator Kissel, and Representative Rebimbas, and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly,

My name is Stephanie Luczak and I am a lifelong resident of Connecticut. Over the course of my short lifetime, I have watched decades of moderate political leadership contribute to the worsening inequities in our state that have caused significant harm to Black, Indigenous, and Latinx residents. While I commend the State of Connecticut for taking action in addressing police accountability in our state, I write to you today to urge you to take bold, honest, and audacious action further than the current form of Bill Number 3471 An Act Concerning Police Accountability.

At its core, the current system of policing in the United States is rooted in white supremacy. As evidenced by recent murders across the nation that have gained national attention, the current movement demands us to collectively begin unravelling the injustice that is purposefully woven into not just our systems of policing, but all of our public systems that purposefully work to oppress Black and Brown folks across their entire lifespans.

But this information is not news to many, particularly here in Connecticut where racism continues to run rampant. As reported by the Hartford Courant on June 5th, 2020, police in Connecticut have killed 21 people in the last 5 years alone.¹ As a result, community organizers and activists in Connecticut have long stood for systemic change to policing to only see diluted policy changes made through the changes in the legislature. While incremental change is nice, State Representative Robyn Porter said recently on the Capitol steps: “We don’t want incremental change because there is nothing incremental about the way [Black people] are being killed.”

Testimony on the Proposed Bill as Currently Written

Incremental change is exactly what the current bill proposes. For example, several sections in the proposed bill mirror many of the proposed reforms included in Campaign Zero’s “8 Can’t Wait” including:

- Section 12 – Police Transparency and Accountability Task Force
- Sections 29 – Justified Use of Deadly Force and Chokeholds
- Section 30 – Officers Duty to Intervene to Stop Use of Excessive Force
- Section 30 – Use of Force Recordkeeping and Reporting

In response to these misguided reforms that rely on flawed research, the “8 to Abolition” campaign identifies these proposals to be “dangerous and irresponsible, offering a slate of reforms that have already

¹ Rondinone, N. (2020). Police have killed 21 people in Connecticut in the past five years. Here’s a look at those deadly encounters. Hartford: Hartford Courant. Retrieved from: <https://www.courant.com/breaking-news/hc-news-clb-deadly-police-shootings-past-five-years-20200605-ol2kfpmh2ngrnhq7hnzcv55rqy-story.html>.

been tried and failed, that mislead a public newly invigorated to the possibilities of police and prison abolition, and that do not reflect the needs of criminalized communities.”²

Further sections of this bill also rely on faulty research, such as Section 7 – Implicit Bias Training for Police Officers. In 2019, researchers published a meta-study that examined a total of 492 studies and concluded that changes in implicit measures of behavior (e.g., changes on an Implicit Bias Assessment over a period of time) do not necessarily translate into changes in explicit measures of behavior (e.g., racist profiling and policing).³

As the abolitionist organization Critical Resistance recently noted “[reforms to policing] will merely improve policing’s war on us.”⁴ Other pieces of this bill simply maintain the current power of the police in Connecticut or adds meaningless requirements to police departments across the state, in which we have seen police departments either ignore or use for their own benefit (i.e., when proposed with new requirements, use said requirements to increase funding). This can be seen in Sections 10 and 11 – Reports on Recruiting Minority Police Officers, Section 14 – Police Badge and Name Tag Requirement, Section 18 – Evaluation of Social Workers Responding to Certain Police Calls, and Sections 19 & 20 – Body Cameras, Dashboard Cameras, and Related Grants.

Proposed Recommendations toward Police Abolition in Connecticut

In an effort to propose recommendations that the state can take towards police abolition in Connecticut, the following recommendations draw from 8 to Abolition’s recommendations. They state, “The end goal of these reforms is not to create better, friendlier, or more community-oriented police or prisons. Instead, we hope to build toward a society without police or prisons, where communities are equipped to provide for their safety and wellbeing.”⁵

1.) Defund the Police

The Connecticut General Assembly should take meaningful action to defund the police under the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection inclusive of state police, their jurisdiction of the University of Connecticut’s Police Department, and incentivize town aid for municipal governments who prioritize defunding local police departments.

In FY20, the state allocated more than \$180 million to the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection.⁶ While this only accounts for less than 1 percent of the overall state budget, state police troopers and sergeants retain hefty salaries, utilize millions of dollars in overtime funds, and contribute

² 8toAbolition. Retrieved from: <https://www.8toabolition.com/>.

³ Forscher, P.S., Lai, C.K., Axt, J.R., Ebersole, C.R., Herman, M., Devine, P.G., Nosek, B.A. (2019). A meta-analysis of procedures to change implicit measures. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 117, 522-559. Retrieved from: <https://psyarxiv.com/dv8tu/>.

⁴ Critical Resistance cited on <https://www.8toabolition.com/>.

⁵ Mohapatra, M., Raven, L., Amuchie, N., Sultan, R., Agbebiyi, K., Hamid, S.T., Herskind, M., Purnell, D., Dru, E., Kuo, R. (2020). 8 to Abolition: Abolitionist policy changes to demand from your city officials. Retrieved from: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5edbf321b6026b073fef97d4/t/5ee0817c955eaa484011b8fe/1591771519433/8toAbolition_V2.pdf.

⁶ Connecticut General Assembly Office of Fiscal Analysis. (2019). Connecticut state budget FY 20 and FY 21. Retrieved from: https://www.cga.ct.gov/ofa/Documents/year/BB/2020BB-20191022_FY%2020%20and%20FY%2021%20Connecticut%20Budget.pdf.

to the state's ongoing pension responsibility.⁷ Amidst a looming budget crisis as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, paired with Connecticut's previous financial challenges, the state should prioritize an austerity budgeting approach for both police as well as corrections.

To take clear steps toward defunding the police, the Connecticut General Assembly should:

- Work to significantly reduce the salaries of state police until they are zeroed out;
- Enact legislation that immediately fires police officers who have any excessive force complaints;
- Implement a hiring freeze for new state troopers or replacements of fired or resigned officers;
- Examine and eliminate the state's pension program for state police.

2.) Demilitarize Communities

While Section 40 of the current bill generally prohibits law enforcement agencies from acquiring or using military designed equipment, as written it fails to outright ban the use of military equipment. The Connecticut General Assembly should impose a ban on the use of military equipment, withdraw participation in police militarization programs, and refuse grants that entangle municipal police entities with the Department of Homeland Security, the Joint Terrorism Task Force, and FBI.

In addition, the increased use of surveillance technologies (including but not limited to: drones, face printing, DNA and biometric databases, risk profiling algorithms) pose significant threat to the freedom and quality of life of predominantly Black and Brown communities in Connecticut. The legislature should enact a ban on the use of all surveillance technologies throughout the state including a ban on contracting with any private companies that provide these services, as well as prohibiting the experimental design and rollout of in-house systems.

3.) Remove Police from Schools

Researchers in Connecticut⁸ have demonstrated the harmful effects of police in schools on student learning and development, particularly for Black and Latino students. At the state level, Connecticut should eliminate all funding dedicated to police and repeal all truancy laws, including the definition of truancy as determined by the State Department of Education.⁹

4.) Free People from Prisons and Jails

Echoing the Katal Center's call to #FreeThemNowCT, the State of Connecticut should take urgent action to release as many incarcerated people as possible to save lives amid the COVID-19 public health crisis.¹⁰

⁷ Lender, J. (2016). State police rack up OT; 70 troopers, 47 sergeants, get at least \$50,000 each above base pay. Hartford: Hartford Courant. Retrieved from: <https://www.courant.com/breaking-news/hc-lender-police-pay-20161208-column.html>.

⁸ Hudson, C.H., Ruth, L., Simmons, W.W. (2019) Policing Connecticut's hallways: The prevalence and impact of school resource officers in Connecticut. New Haven: Connecticut Voices for Children. Retrieved from: <https://ctvoices.org/publication/policing-connecticuts-hallways-the-prevalence-and-impact-of-school-resource-officers-in-connecticut/>.

⁹ Connecticut State Department of Education. (no date). Truancy. Retrieved from: <https://portal.ct.gov/SDE/Truancy/Truancy#:~:text=A%20truancy%20is%20defined%20as,guardian%20within%2010%20school%20days.>

¹⁰ Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice. (2020). #freethemnowct. Retrieved from: <https://www.katalcenter.org/freethemnow>.

Hundreds of people in Connecticut's correctional facilities have tested positive for COVID-19, the majority of whom are Black and Latinx.

In addition, the Connecticut legislature should examine its current "alternatives to incarceration" that are carceral in nature, including problem-solving courts and electronic monitoring and coercive restorative justice programs.

5.) Repeal Laws that Criminalize Survival

Connecticut has taken important steps to repeal laws that criminalize survival, such as Public Act No. 18-5, also known as the "Dominant Aggressor Law", which changed state law to give officers more on-site discretion when making arrests in cases of interpersonal violence.¹¹ In addition, Connecticut has worked to become a national leader in homelessness reform, with significant efforts resulting in a reduction of individuals experiencing homelessness across the state.¹²

However, individuals who are poor or have lower incomes in a state that has the nation's widest wealth disparities must be addressed. Across the country, the majority of folks who are incarcerated are facing pre-trial detention because they cannot currently afford bail. Moreover, costs associated with the current police and prison system have a disproportionately negative affect on those who cannot afford to pay. Connecticut should end all fines and fees associated with the criminal legal process, including ticketing, cash bail, court costs, and parole and probation fees.

6.) Invest in Community Self-Governance

While much of the processes to establish community self-governance lies within the power of the state's municipalities, the State should prioritize community self-governance as a practice within the state legislature, urging municipalities to follow. Community self-governance also acts as a pathway to begin to reform the state's legislative processes. All too often, including the instance related to the matters of this bill, communities who are most affected by the issues at hand are often furthest from the decision making. It is not a coincidence that it is complex and difficult to access information about the state's legislative processes, including bill language and processes.

In addition, Connecticut should:

- Increase transparency and accessibility of state and municipal legislative processes;
- Require neighborhood councils as representative bodies within municipal decision making;
- Invest in multilingual resources for populations whose primary language is not English, particularly immigrant and asylum-seeking communities;
- Invest in community-based public safety approaches, including non-carceral violence prevention and intervention programs and skills-based education on bystander intervention, consent, boundaries, and healthy relationships.

7.) Provide Safe, Accessible Housing for Everyone

¹¹ Jarmoc, K. (2019). Senate-approved bill increases victim safety in dual arrests. CT Mirror. Retrieved from: <https://ctmirror.org/category/ct-viewpoints/senate-approved-bill-increases-victim-safety-in-dual-arrests/>.

¹² Thomas, J.R. (2020). Homelessness is down in CT. Here are 5 things to know. CT Mirror. Retrieved from: <https://ctmirror.org/2020/01/08/homelessness-is-down-in-ct-here-are-5-things-to-know/>.

Most urgently, cancel rent without burden of repayment during COVID-19. The current pandemic has created an economic crisis for thousands of Connecticut's residents, but has not created new problems for our state. The burden of rent and the

Despite the state's work in recent years to provide support to individuals experiencing homelessness, high-quality, affordable housing in Connecticut remains significantly out of reach for many of Connecticut's residents. Connecticut should prioritize investments in a diverse array of affordable housing options across the state, rather than prioritizing market value for housing costs.

Connecticut should also invest in non-coercive housing options for young people experiencing abuse or family rejection, particularly if it is a direct result of their queer or trans identities.

8.) Fully Invest in Care, Not Cops

While outside the purview of the Judiciary Committee, it is important to acknowledge that Connecticut has taken an austerity budgeting approach to education, health, infrastructure and other priorities that are critical to our state's opportunities for growth and innovation. Most notably, the 2017 budget deal imposed harmful restrictions on state spending.

Many of the issues that result in crime, policing, and incarceration are a result of the lack of a social safety net and strong foundational support for collective prosperity. Connecticut can become a national leader in improving the quality of life for all of its residents by further investing in the below elements that support the collective care of our communities, with particular emphasis on free programming for marginalized communities as a form of reparations for the harm that has been caused, including:

- healthcare, wellness resources, neighborhood-based trauma centers, non-coercive drug and alcohol treatment programming, peer support networks, and training for healthcare professionals;
- free, robust, and sensible public transport, especially serving marginalized and low-income communities;
- community-based food banks, grocery cooperatives, gardens, and farms;
- teachers, counselors, universal childcare, and support for all family structures;
- youth programs that promote learning, safety, and community care.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on this important bill. Connecticut's residents deserve to live in a state that prioritizes their well-being, health, education, and safety, rather than prioritizing the existing policing and incarceration systems that have harmed too many people in our state.

I am available for further questions and can be reached at Stephanie.a.luczak@gmail.com.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Luczak