

Dear Connecticut Legislators,

My name is Stephen Douglas and I live and work in New Haven, CT. I am a Pediatric and Maternity hospital chaplain, and I am grateful for your time and consideration around an issue that I believe strongly impacts this state's public health and the physical and emotional wellbeing of its citizens. I am writing to express my support for LCO# 3471 "An Act Concerning Police Accountability." It is past time to move decisively, boldly and thoughtfully to protect black and brown lives, and it is past time to move closer to the aspirations upon which this beautiful country was founded. It is a good bill, and a positive step, and I ask that it be strengthened by:

—Giving municipalities the power to establish Civilian Review Boards with subpoena powers, and that this subpoena power be an intrinsic power of each and every review board.

—Outlawing police searches without probable cause, even if the person consents to the search.

—Outlawing police offers from asking for any documents (such as green cards, and other immigration documents) other than a driver's license during traffic stops.

—Mandating a duty to intervene if a police officer witnesses another officer using excessive or illegal use-of-force. We need to empower our officers to follow their consciences without fear of reprisal.

—Ending qualified immunity for officers who violate people's civil rights.

—No stop and frisk, under any circumstance.

—Demilitarizing of Connecticut police departments, including the disposal of all military equipment currently held by police departments. Just as devoting billions of dollars to a new piece of military equipment creates a cognitive and spiritual shift that makes a people more likely to find reason to use it, purchasing military equipment by police department creates, I believe, a cognitive, spiritual shift in how the department views itself, and how it views its role in relationship to the community it serves. We must reject the militarism of police forces

—Requiring that police officers to prominently display their badge.

—Stronger Use of Force Standard. The bill should require that any use of deadly force is 'necessary' rather than the current standard of 'objectively reasonable.' This standard should also include an officers' entire engagement with a person(s) rather than just the moment when severe or deadly force was used. As a person of faith, I unequivocally reject the term "necessary force" as pertains to taking another person's life, but am instead advocating for a position which is not only reasonable; any less is indefensible.

I also want to highlight the components of the bill I disagree with, which include:

—I agree with my black and brown siblings that this is not the time to address these systemic and serious problems by increasing funding for police departments, whether municipal or state. I support the immediate defunding and divestment from police departments and reallocation of these resources for social services.

—I work with many wonderful social workers, and I trust that they would respond creatively and

humanely in appropriate situations. They should not under any circumstance be hired and paid as employees of police departments. Rather if it is determined that they are the best responders to certain behavioral and mental health crises they should operate independently from police departments, either as an ancillary and independent emergency program also connected to timely crisis responses, or perhaps as part of EMT/Fire response teams.

—Police officers and politicians are overrepresented on the Police Officer Standards and Training Council. They make up 12/20 of the Council's membership. Police officers have a vital and important perspective on what officer standards need to be, but no one other than citizens of a community, the people politicians and police are meant to serve, should make up the majority of this important body.

When I taught writing and composition to young people, I would always teach Martin Luther King's, Jr's "Letter from Birmingham Jail." It's a towering piece of prose, and it speaks deeply to this moment. It is worth remembering for me, and for other white people of conscience, that this letter was not written in response to virulent, violent racists, but rather it was responding to well meaning, thoughtful clergy persons, who for the most part agreed with King that it was their job to advocate for racial justice, for safety and for a more compassionate, well functioning society. These were not the Bull Connors of history. They were good men who thought King was moving too fast, and demanding too much, too soon. His response will forever ring, I pray, in the ears of all people of conscience and good will, especially those that have the heavy and precious power to propose and enact the laws by which we live, that "There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair." There comes a time, far past now, when it is unacceptable to say, "Slow down." There comes a time when, in the face of repeated and systemic violence, that it is violence itself to speak from a place of position and power and to say, "Give it time" to our black and brown and indigenous siblings, who are telling us that they must teach their kids not to linger in a store, not to wear their hood on their sweatshirt up, not to jog through a predominantly white neighborhood, because they fear, with good cause, for their very lives. There comes a time, a pray you agree with me, that it is unacceptable, to say "Wait."

Thank you for your time and consideration, and for the work you do in the interest of a more free, equitable and just state.

Sincerely,  
Stephen Douglas