

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly,

My name is Takina Pollock Shafer and I live in Bridgeport, CT. I am an educator and an organizer. The Movement for Black Lives has brought the conversation around racism in policing across the country back into the spotlight. Organizers and activists continue to push back on harmful policing practices that are disproportionately killing, maiming, traumatizing, and incarcerating Black people. Meanwhile, the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA) continues to miss the mark in its response.

The parallels between slavery and policing are undeniable throughout history, especially considering the 13th Amendment which holds that no one may be held in slavery *except as punishment for a crime*, which was passed when enslavement of Black people ended. Similarly, in Connecticut, the Gradual Abolition Act was passed in 1784 and it would be 64 years before slavery was outlawed in the state. In the same year, “Night Watch,” the foundation for policing in this country, would appear in Bridgeport and other areas largely populated with free Black people. The parallels to policing and control of Black bodies is undeniable in history. Racism has been removed from the language of law but it has not been removed from the practice. Many of us wonder if Connecticut will continue to follow this same faux-progressive path. While the AACPA appears to be a step in the right direction on the surface, there are a number of flaws in this bill posing as progressive change.

The current demand for Black Lives is to divest from police. This bill not only makes no effort to that end, it proposes measures that would ultimately put more money in police departments. Additional training, hiring minority officers, body cameras, and dashboard cameras are all additional expenses. There is no body of research to suggest that implicit bias training is effective at reducing police officers’ biases, nor does hiring additional minority officers reduce the violence of policing. These are only manipulative measures to improve public relations with failing public servants. This bill is only a continuation of the era of community policing, which spawned with the Omnibus Crime Control & Safe Streets Act of 1968, the same year the era known as the Civil Rights Movement ended. This Act pumped millions of federal dollars into community policing programs to repair the image of police officers who had spent years assaulting and murdering Black protestors and their allies across the country. This is a historical trend we are seeing continue today.

Moreover, proposing measures like body cameras and dashboard cameras without amending the ability for police officers to view footage 48-96 hours before the public (per Public Act 19-90 Sec. 2, (f)), leads many to wonder who the cameras are really serving. While this bill does contain some measures that are responsive to the demands of the people, it falls short of the progressive, radical change we need.

Proposing to investigate police brutality without reducing the capacity of the police to brutalize people is dishonest, at best. Very rarely are police officers held accountable for their violence and this is largely due to qualified immunity. Civilian Review Boards (CRBs) will be hard pressed to change this, as CRBs across the country have yielded few favorable results due to qualified immunity and the power of police unions. Qualified immunity and the protections

offered by unions have harmful consequences. In Bridgeport this looks like police officer James Boulay profiting in the same city where he murdered a child; it looks like it taking *six* arrests of former officer Steven Figueroa before he was fired; it looks like 17 officers being found to have lied on reports about their brutality on Colorado Avenue, continuing to be employed and undisciplined.

This bill proposes that officers are required to have their badge number and name visible, that they must use their body and dashboard cameras. In Connecticut, we have seen police officers cover their name and badge number as regular practice, and it is reasonable to assume there are officers who have turned off their cameras at critical moments. What will happen to those officers who are found to violate these attempts at accountability? How will the CGA ensure that the exorbitant power police unions have over discipline do not interfere with the accountability and transparency this bill proposes? Will Connecticut continue to be known as *the land of steady habits*, making reforms that do nothing to change the status quo? Or will the CGA finally embody the progressive voice they say they have?

Some progressive solutions to focus on would be to:

1. end qualified immunity,
2. demilitarize our communities,
3. remove police from schools,
4. repeal laws that criminalize survival,
5. invest in solutions like housing, free healthcare, free childcare
6. restorative justice as an alternative to legal intervention.

The future Connecticut deserves will not be found in incremental reforms.

Thank you,

Takina Pollock  
Bridgeport, CT