

Dear members of the Judiciary Committee,

I am writing to urge you to support LCO #3471, including the end of stop-and-frisk and the end of qualified immunity. This bill's provisions to end qualified immunity and ban stop and frisk in Connecticut are critical, bare-minimum steps the legislature must take now to begin reducing the reach, role, and responsibilities of policing as it currently exists.

We must be consistent and firm in our message to the community, to our police, and to the nation and world: Connecticut is a place where the people rule, where those we entrust with keeping our peace must be held to higher standards, not lower ones, and where when we do invest in policing, that must be understood by all as an investment in those who serve our communities by delivering peace and justice, rather than occupying them under the threat of deadly force.

Sadly, my home of Wethersfield, CT is now the third town in which I have lived and in which an unarmed, uncharged man of color was recently put to death by a police officer while attempting to flee. Here, it was Anthony Vega, just last year. Before that, my hometown of North Charleston, SC was the site of another such incident involving Walter Scott, and very recently Rayshard Brooks was killed in yet another incident only a mile from my old home in South Atlanta.

Charleston is also where Dylann Roof murdered nine people in a church that stands on a street named for John C. Calhoun in the shadow of his towering statue, before being treated respectfully by the arresting officer. That statue, like many others, is finally coming down, as are hopefully the systems of oppression it represents. It is in this growing spirit of long-overdue reckoning and righting of injustices that I join with other concerned community members in strongly encouraging you to make the following amendments to strengthen this bill:

1. Ending qualified immunity for officers who violate people's civil rights.
2. Banning stop-and-frisk in Connecticut.
3. Demilitarizing of Connecticut police departments, including the disposal of all military equipment currently held by police departments.
4. Requiring that police officers to prominently display their badge
5. 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. (Note: the police treated Dylann Roof with dignity and care, even stopping to buy him a cheeseburger after he was arrested. But when police interact with people of color, particularly Black and Brown youth like Wethersfield resident Anthony Vega (Chulo), and so many others in this state who have been murdered at the hands of police, the "use of force" becomes "necessary." This discrepancy in the use of force lays bare the inherent bias in policing created and maintained by white supremacy and a disregard for Black and brown lives.)

6. No increase in funding for police departments, either municipal or state. In a time when we are facing a worldwide pandemic, funds should be diverted from police departments to better financial support health care services, education, affording housing, and social service programs providing assistance to low-income folks.

7. Social workers should be used to support folks with mental health or needs or difficulty accessing services, but should not be employed by police departments. They should be employed and compensated using the funds divested from police departments and invested in community care.

8. The overrepresentation of police officers and politicians on the Police Officer Standards and Training Council is problematic, compromises the integrity of the council and undermines its purpose. As written, they currently make up 12/20 of the Council's membership. This council should be dominated by civilians, and not by police officers or their employers.

Thank you for your time.

Best regards,

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Wethersfield, CT