

July 17th, 2020

Hello Committee Chair Winfield, Committee Chair Strafstrom, Vice Chair Kasser, Vice Chair Blumenthal and Ranking Members Kissel and Rebimbas.

My name is Alexandra Opsahl. I live at 70 Howe Street in New Haven, CT.

I am writing to comment on Draft LCO #3471: An Act Concerning Police Accountability. For too long, Connecticut's police have ignored the civil rights of their residents and routinely targeted Black, Indigenous, and Latinx people with violence and criminalization. Because of a lack of accountability and oversight, Connecticut police have killed 21 people in the last five years, and have contributed to the frequent violation and harassment of Connecticut's most marginalized communities.

This draft legislation represents a start, but still falls short of the fundamental overhaul necessary to protect Black, brown, and low-income communities in Connecticut from police violence. For example, instances of "may" must be changed to "shall" to make this legislation binding. Police mental health assignments should be conducted annually instead of every five years. Random drug testing should similarly be enforced—for everything, including steroids.

Broadly, before this bill can be taken seriously as a good-faith effort to address this state's scourge of police terror, it must intervene against the violence of the state's correctional institutions and officers as well as police. For greater oversight and accountability of Connecticut's correctional institutions, this bill must include:

1. **Correctional Reform.** Provisions of the bill aimed at holding police accountable **MUST** extend to correctional officers. Just as policing disproportionately damages Black and brown communities, prisons disproportionately lock up Black and brown people. In Connecticut, 71% of the people in prison are Black and brown. In Northern Correctional, the State's supermax facility, 82% of people are Black and brown.
2. **Independent Oversight.** The bill's draft language calls for the creation of an Inspector General appointed by the Chief State's Attorney. First, this is not independent oversight as prosecutors work closely with police officers and cannot be considered reliably independent. Second, the Inspector General would not be charged with monitoring and investigating correctional staff performance and institutional policy. The bill's draft language only covers correctional oversight when investigating a death in the Department of Correction (D.O.C) custody, an absolute bare minimum that should not

be considered substantive oversight. Notably, Connecticut is one of the only states that lacks external oversight of the D.O.C.

3. **A Shift in Funding from Corrections to Communities.** The bill's focus on demilitarization does not go far enough. The bill must explicitly shift funding from policing and re-allocate it towards communities of color. Likewise, the bill must include a shift in funding from militarizing and overpopulating the D.O.C. to investing in resources for incarcerated and formerly incarcerated individuals. Now that the state has drastically reduced the prison population, it is time to have a serious conversation about when and how to begin closing costly prisons, starting with Northern Correctional, a facility recently cited by the United Nations for human rights violations due to the excessive use of solitary confinement.
4. **Banning routine practices that inflict long-term trauma.** The bill's focus on banning practices that inflict wanton and unnecessary violence during police stops is well warranted. Banning these practices is long overdue, but tactics such as chokeholds must also be banned in the Department of Correction. Similarly, the bill should focus on banning solitary confinement, an ineffective practice often understood to be torture, which can inflict life long trauma. The bill must also ban the use of prone and in-cell restraints.
5. **Qualified Immunity.** The use of qualified immunity to shield police from civil action is an essential component of this legislation; the abolition of qualified immunity must be extended to correctional officers.

Please stand on the right side of history and do your part to change this fundamentally broken and racist institution.

Sincerely,
Alexandra Opsahl