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Testimony to the Judiciary Committee

March 16, 2007

Chiefs Anthony Salvatore & James Strillacci, Connecticut Police Chiefs Association

We oppose **RB #7211, AAC Use of Electronic Defense Weapons**, which would limit the use of these devices by police to protecting themselves or third parties from immediate physical injury. It is too restrictive.

The Connecticut standard for self-defense for any person is stated in Sec. 53a-19: "a person is justified in using reasonable physical force ... to defend himself or a third person from ... the use or imminent use of physical force, and he may use such degree of force which he reasonably believes to be necessary for such purpose." Any civilian is allowed to use force against force; defense against immediate physical injury is not required.

At 53a-22, Connecticut law recognizes the nature of police duty and allows police to use force, to the extent reasonably believed to be necessary, in situations other than self-defense—namely, to make an arrest or to prevent the escape of an offender. This bill appears to place those situations off-limits for TASERs and similar devices.

If this bill becomes law, would police be able to use a TASER to stop a fleeing rapist? Could we use it on an emotionally disturbed person who is holding a knife to his own throat?

As worded, the bill seems to require police either to wait until they are actually attacked, or to use another option. However, many of those options are more likely to result in injury than stun-guns.

When a person does not submit to arrest, police options include unarmed techniques, chemical sprays, and impact weapons. Each has its own potential for injury.

Unarmed techniques, like tackling, wrestling, judo, or similar martial arts, can result in bruises, scrapes, twisted joints and pulled muscles from the holds or from contact with the ground. They also expose the officer to significant danger if the suspect is bigger, stronger, adrenalized, drugged, or (surprise!) armed.

Chemicals, like pepper spray or mace, cause eye, nose and throat irritation and require decontamination afterward. Second-hand spray often affects the officers as well, but some subjects are immune.

Impact weapons, like batons or flashlights, cause cuts, bruises and broken bones even when used correctly. The same goes for bean-bag launchers. Officers are taught to avoid vital areas, but suspects don't always stand still; an errant hit can cause grievous injury or death.

By comparison, the vast majority of people subjected to TASER feel no ill-effects whatsoever. Police in Connecticut have used TASERs in scores of cases to avoid using more hazardous methods—including the use of deadly force.

This bill would have the undesired effect of increasing injuries both to police and to civilians. We urge you to reject it.