

Testimony

RE: SB No. 1206 AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECORDING OF POLICE ACTIVITY BY THE PUBLIC

March 23, 2011

Dear Senator Eric Coleman, Representative Gerald Fox, and members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Megan Fountain, and I am a member of New Haven Against Police Brutality. We are a grassroots volunteer organization that assists police brutality victims. I am submitting testimony in support of **proposed Senate Bill No. 1206 AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECORDING OF POLICE ACTIVITY BY THE PUBLIC**. I urge you to approve this measure immediately, because unfortunately there are several dangerous police officers abusing people in my community right now. The police chief has attempted and failed to clean up the force, and this bill will help him and all police chiefs to create discipline and improve relations between the police and community.

In New Haven, there is a police officer named Dennis O'Connell who is accused of committing 9 incidents of brutality and multiple car accidents with his police cruiser. The Police Department has failed to discipline or dismiss this officer, despite the fact that 9 victims have submitted complaints to the NHPD Office of Internal Values and Ethics. He is accused of sexually assaulting a victim during an unwarranted strip search, beating and stomping on a victim while he was handcuffed, tasing a victims multiple times while he was already handcuffed, and spraying the eyes of a victim with mace while he was handcuffed.

Why has this officer not been dismissed from the force? In New Haven, when the police chief has attempted to discipline or dismiss abusive officers, he has faced a revolt from the police officers' union and their lawyers, and he has backed down. That leaves the victims — poor African Americans and Latinos with no money for private lawyers — to advocate for themselves in courtrooms where prosecutors and judges routinely take the word of the officer against their word. Without video evidence, it is extremely difficult to build a case against an officer and rid the police force of abusive officers.

Video recordings are the only tool that powerless victims can use to get a fair hearing in court. For this reason, I urge you to pass **Proposed Senate Bill No. 1206** immediately.

Good police officers have nothing to fear from increased transparency and accountability. There are many police officers who want to serve and protect the community. They want the police force to be more accountable and transparent to the community, because they know that their job will become easier when the community trusts them.

In a democracy, we value transparency. The public has the right to know what public employees are doing in the public sphere. Police should not be exempt. Military dictatorships allow police to act without public scrutiny; we cannot allow this in an open, democratic society.

Respectfully submitted,

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