

March 12, 2012

To: Judiciary Committee

From: Paulette Cohen

Re: HYPERLINK "[http://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?](http://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType=Bill&bill_num=SB00364&which_year=2012)

[selBillType=Bill&bill_num=SB00364&which_year=2012](http://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType=Bill&bill_num=SB00364&which_year=2012)" S.B. No. 364
(RAISED) AN ACT CONCERNING TRAFFIC STOP INFORMATION.

Senator Coleman and Representative Fox,

My name is Paulette Cohen and I have been a resident of New Haven for almost 30 years. I am here to testify in favor of S.B. 364. It is an important bill that will give us the tools we need to put an end to racial profiling in Connecticut. It is a goal I support as a person, and a goal I support as a board member of the ACLU-CT. But the real reason I am here today is that I saw Representative Gary Holder-Winfield at a meeting on Saturday where he spoke eloquently about what this bill means to him personally. He also spoke about the need for citizens who are not minorities to testify about why this bill is important to them. That struck home with me. This bill is not just about African Americans or Latinos. This bill is about the fabric of the society I live in.

I live in a lovely neighborhood in New Haven. We have an active block watch, and an active Neighborhood Management Team where our local police officer is seen as a friend and ally in preventing crime. I have Lieutenant Reddish's telephone number on my cell because he gives it out at meetings and tells us to use it if we need to. If I had to use it, I wouldn't hesitate. My expectation would be a prompt, concerned and helpful response. This is true despite an experience I had several years ago when I was the driver of the middle car in a three-car crash. The officer, who took almost 45 minutes to arrive, used a bullhorn when he first addressed us, was rude and abusive, and threatened to take me to police headquarters if I continued to question a ticket he was writing up for me. I did what I was told, but when I returned home I called the police, asked for the complaint department, and explained what had happened. I did this because previous experience led me to believe that the police in my neighborhood are on my side. And I was not disappointed. A senior officer arrived at my house, took my statement, apologized for the other officer's behavior, explained that the department

was already compiling a dossier on this policeman, who was a good cop who had gone bad, and who should have been retired. He thanked me for coming forth to help the department and told me not to worry about the ticket.

Compare my experience with the experience of George Long, whose story appeared in the New Haven Independent last November. [http://www.newhavenindependent.org/index.php/archives/entry/newhallville_case/]

I hope Mr. Long is testifying before your committee today. Let me quickly review his story. Mr. Long, a 50 year old African American carpenter who resides in Newhallville, a neighborhood adjacent to mine, was celebrating his son's birthday when an officer came to his door. His nephew had been stopped nearby and arrested by a statewide narcotics task force team. Mr. Long was asked to step outside, ostensibly to verify that the man in the car was indeed his nephew. What ensued was one of the state officers questioning whether a bulge in Mr. Long's pocket was a gun. Even though Mr. Long explained that it was a cell phone and a lighter, which it was, and even though Mr. Long was there to identify his nephew, not as a suspect, the officer punched him in the face and kicked him after he fell against a fence. Other officers pulled their Tasers as neighbors watched. The NHI quotes one neighbor as saying "It was crazy. They grabbed him and jumped on him and beat him up—and arrested him. He didn't do no shoving...He said, 'Am I under arrest?' They grabbed him. " Mr Long was arrested for interfering with the law enforcement, and the State wanted him to admit his guilt for his freedom. He refused, and as of the time of the NHI article he was countersuing for police misconduct.

What is wrong with this picture? Just about everything. The real question is why does some version of this happen so frequently, and in so many different ways, to people of color?

However, this is not the question I came here today to try to answer. The question Gary Holder-Winfield posed is why does this pattern of police misconduct toward persons of color concern me. After all, this is not the way things happen in my neighborhood. Police frequently knock on my door because one of my neighbors house alarm has gone off. I often walk outside with them with my pockets bulging with a cell phone, keys, pens and tissues. No one has ever asked me what I had in my pockets.

On the most selfish level, racial profiling concerns me because it jeopardizes my safety. There is a lot of crime in Newhallville. Most of the crime affects Newhallville residents, but some of it spills over into my neighborhood. I wonder whom among Mr. Long's extended family, friend and neighborhood network will call the police when they witness a crime. Which one of them will cooperate with the police when they are trying to solve, stop, or prevent a crime. And that in and of itself is a crime, because there are a lot damn good police officers in New Haven, but the poisonous atmosphere created by racial profiling by some officers taints all of law enforcement, and makes it much harder for New Haven's finest to do their job. And without the statistics that S.B. 364 will help compile, there is insufficient pressure on revenue-strapped local and state law enforcement departments to confront and put an end to this type of police misconduct.

There is another issue though that concerns me about racial profiling, and it should concern those like me, whether they live in the mostly Caucasian neighborhoods of New Haven, or towns like Guilford or Chester. It is the issue of poverty. And I'm not talking here about poor neighborhoods--although that should concern all of us as well—I'm talking of the poverty of cutting ourselves off from people who are different from ourselves, people who have different histories, different but equally vibrant cultures that can enrich the tapestry of our own lives. The most pernicious effect of racial profiling is that it makes fear the default setting of interacting with people of color. And that fear makes all our lives narrower and more impoverished.

Please pass this bill; for my sake, as well as for Gary Holder-Winfield's sake.

