



Connecticut State Conference of NAACP Branches

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Testimony in favor of House Bill 6628, An Act Concerning the Safe Use of Electronic Defense Weapons by Peace Officers

Good afternoon Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and members of the Judiciary Committee. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before you today in favor of House Bill 6628, concerning the use of Tasers by police. I'm Abdul-Shahid Muhammad Ansari, president of the Greater Hartford NAACP and political action chair of the Connecticut State Conference of NAACP Branches.

Several years ago, when police started arming themselves with Tasers, we heard that these weapons were not lethal and that officers would use them as an alternative to deadly force. A police officer would fire a Taser to subdue a violent suspect instead of shooting and killing that suspect with a gun. Tasers would save lives. And it seems as if Tasers are sometimes used that way, but it's not the whole story, not even close.

Over and over again we hear about Tasers being used not as an alternative to deadly force but as an alternative to talking, negotiating or showing a little patience. We see them used against people who pose no threat to others but who are passively resisting an officer's orders. We see them used on people who are not violent but are only uncooperative, often people who are mentally ill or under the influence of alcohol or drugs. And we see them used disproportionately on minorities.

We can't say exactly how disproportionately because we don't require the police to tell us who they shoot with Tasers. We only know for sure about the 11 people who have died in Connecticut since 2005 after being Tasered by the police, and we know that eight of those people were African American or Latino. We know that at least nine of those 11 people were completely unarmed and that none of them had guns or knives.

We know that one young African American man died after he was Tasered while handcuffed in the back of a Waterbury police car because he was kicking the upholstery. We know that a Latino man in Middletown died after he was shocked 34 times while handcuffed, after his family asked for help dealing with his severe anxiety attack. Neither of these men was suspected of anything more serious than breach of peace when police arrived. In fact only one of the 11 people who have died was suspected of a violent crime, and that suspect had brought the alleged victim to the hospital and was running away when he was Tasered.

It's at least a little bit ironic that this state has repealed its death penalty but still allows police to shoot people with a weapon that can kill, without any regulation or oversight. We may have had the excuse, at first, that we thought Tasers were harmless but we don't have that excuse any

more. Even when Tasers don't kill, the barbs tear into flesh and muscle, the probes burn, the shock causes people to fall and get hurt. You might be interested to know that when the police tell you that getting shocked by a Taser is part of their training, they don't tell you about the lawsuits filed by officers who got hurt in the process.

This bill is just a first step. It's truly the least we can do. It will make sure police officers are trained in Taser use and it will make them tell the public exactly why and when they fire a Taser against a human being. Maybe it will make them think twice about shooting people who are in distress, shocking people in the chest, shocking them when they're handcuffed or shocking them multiple times. But mostly it's going to let us see how the police are using Tasers and whether we need to make some reasonable rules, as New Jersey and Florida have done.

I also want to mention House Bill 6663, which would set some rules for how police accept complaints of misconduct. This is another very important measure that the NAACP also supports, and we ask you to pass it so that police will be held accountable for their actions.

Please pass these bills. The public deserves their protection.