

I am here to show my support for Bill No. 6750, An act expanding the requirement for disclosure of arrest records during a pending prosecution under the Freedom of Information Act.

The Connecticut Supreme Court's decision last year stemmed from my original complaint to the Freedom of Information Commission following a nearly fatal attack on Route 8 in Derby. The state police issued a bare bones press release on the incident, in which a man named Toai Nguyen was charged. State police refused to release their full report on the case, and it took several months for the New Haven Register to get it. Once it was finally released, we learned important information and details of legitimate public interest, including how the defendant was in the country illegally at the time of the attack.

The New Haven Register, Middletown Press and Torrington Register Citizen did an investigation last spring, in which reporters posed as private citizens and asked for arrest reports at every police department in the state. We encountered a wide range of responses, from departments like South Windsor which provided a full arrest report, to New Haven, which refused at the time to even show a reporter a basic arrest log. We have many police departments who interpret the current law as the Freedom of Information Commission does and who are committed to transparency. We unfortunately also have police departments who interpret the law as the courts did, using perceived vagueness as an excuse to hide police reports from the public.

As for any argument that arrest reports shouldn't be made public until after a prosecution is over, there are adequate protections in place within the court system to prevent jurors from being swayed by media coverage. During any trial, a judge consistently reminds jurors to avoid any stories in the media on the case in question.

As the New Haven Register wrote in an editorial following the Supreme Court's decision, it could have serious implications on the public's right to know and ability to hold law enforcement accountable. It would allow police to selectively withhold information and avoid scrutiny after arrests. If the media, or the public, does not gain access to detailed information until a case has been disposed of, it allows police to not only pick and choose what to release, but to have enough time to hide any potential errors or mistakes that may have been made in the course of the investigation, our editorial asserted.

Again, I urge the committee to support this bill and transparency in government.

Thank you,



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