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Testimony of Douglas M. Glanville - Hartford Resident
March 16, 2015
Public Health and Welfare Committee
State of Connecticut

This bill was inspired by my experience with a young West Hartford police officer over a year ago and I speak today because it is not resolved. Not in any way that serves our public and certainly not in any way that helps me feel safe. I have not heard any satisfactory nor consistent positions from leaders about the jurisdictional aspect of my incident, which led me to seek other expertise.

Apparently I “closely” fit the description of a guy embroiled in a municipal business dispute in West Hartford over snow shoveling. To certain beneficiaries, there may be social value for sending an extra-jurisdictional message to a suspicious character and those that resemble him, that they are not welcome, but we ignore the social cost of accusing the innocent. Criminal law 101 will tell you for every arrest, there are plenty of stops of innocent people. People who are wrongfully accused become disengaged citizens. Distrustful, resentful. Even worse when there was no crime, let alone not even an ordinance violation.

The description was “black male in his 40s, brown coat, snow shovel.” A description that matches quite a few people on a snowy day in Hartford. I know eyewitnesses are not reliable so the fact that I was wearing a black coat may not have made me less suspicious, but it should have added to the already long list of doubts the officer should have had about whether I was the person he sought.

In retrospect, I would say the officer started with textbook microaggression. Defined as “unnecessary jabs at people’s dignity because you have power or want to assert power.” No introduction, no explanation, just said “So, you trying to make some extra bucks shoveling people’s driveway around here?” So as the wrongfully accused, I was supposed to de-escalate an offensive situation when the person who is inexplicably escalating it, is the authority. Authority with weapons at his disposal. The end result is an unsafe situation for all involved. And this is all happening in my own driveway.

I am thankful that I was not hurt or arrested in my exchange, but let’s pause for a minute and think about what could have been the scenario. What if I backed away from the officer? Failure to Comply? What if my son was outside with me? What if a guy who I had paid was shoveling was in my driveway and the officer did not like his answer?

My reaction was integral to my safety, even though I had every reason to be outraged by how I was approached.

But don't make it about me, West Hartford PD or a young officer. I am just an example. Some may argue an isolated example. To those, I say I hope so, but also that it only takes one incident to establish a precedent. So if we want to address it, we should do it now.

This bill is about jurisdiction, but it directly connects to the criminalization of municipal law.

We can chalk it up to fitting a description or bad manners, we can oversimplify and say the end justifies the means. We can resolve it by PR spin and protect number one rankings or union solidarity, or even send out misdirection by demonizing someone with a record. But in that defensive stance, we forget who we are supposed to defend first and foremost, the innocent. And there is no question, I was innocent.

But for me and for the most vulnerable in our communities, it is not going away and no matter how much people may dispute the motives or previous events that led to why that officer approached me without respect, there is still an eerie silence. It is a silence that comes when those that protect you, do not acknowledge your innocence. It is the silence of feeling like a suspect for every crime or ordinance violation committed in a limitless radius whether in your town or not.

However, the silence around the core social implications at play by those who know the law is not acceptable, nor does it help me communicate to my children that I am safe while simply caring for our home on my own property. And safety does not have to be physical threat, it can be emotional. The kind that comes when someone questions your right to stand where you stand. Especially when you are standing on your own property and they had no business being there.

I do not want to conclude that in Connecticut, it is OK for a peace officer to approach a citizen of another town who was minding his own business in his town while in his own driveway, put him in a threatening situation over a loose description of a person accused of a non-crime, offend him and move on. That alone is highly concerning, but as was confirmed today, it also flies in the face of statutory law.

This bill reduces unnecessary police-civilian contact. The kind of contact that should not happen outside an officer's municipality given the minor infractions associated with municipal law. If we do not enact this bill into law, you run the great risk of having regional manhunts based on vague,unreliable descriptions. This response does not fit the crime when examples of municipal laws are spitting on a sidewalk or the laws governing Bingo.

This kind of pursuit inherently brings with it collateral damage and we all know the disenfranchised would bear the brunt of that damage. I can have a voice here, but so many cannot, the fines are oppressive, transportation to defend themselves is unavailable, work or family obligations prohibitive, municipal courts may be gummed up. Being wrongly accused can destroy their lives. I am fortunate to be able to challenge it, but that is not the typical story.

If we choose to criminalize municipal law across borders, with the power to enforce it in other municipalities, it does accomplish one goal. Intimidation. Muscle flexing to remind certain people to stay on their side of the line. Pick any city in America that borders a suburb with means, and my story is as normal as street signs.

The greatest currencies of law enforcement are legitimacy, civility, and trust. Legitimacy is about being believable, that you acknowledge when you wrong people, especially innocent people. Civility is about humanity. The understanding, that even if someone has done something wrong or fits the description, respect still applies because as we continue to learn, a lot of innocent people are left in the wake of successful police work. Trust is about being dependable, consistent, and setting the example by following the laws that govern. You cannot encourage citizens to follow laws, if you don't follow them yourself.

Unfortunately, in cases like mine, this currency is robbed from the safe of our community confidence. And even worse, makes a large segment of our society less safe. Maybe that segment is getting traded off for another segment that is deemed more important.

We all need to have faith that being innocent counts, not be some stepping stone to finding an allegedly suspicious person. When the innocent is unapologetically accused, all innocence is lost.

Narrow the scope of fitting the description.

There are extreme circumstances when law enforcement can cross town lines to enforce law. Municipal law should not be one of those circumstances.

Support this bill.

I am attaching a link to the original article I wrote in The Atlantic about the incident

[Doug Glanville - The Atlantic](#)