



Testimony to the Judiciary Committee

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Common Cause in Connecticut

Senator Coleman, Representative Tong and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Cheri Quickmire, and I am the Executive Director of Common Cause in Connecticut. Common Cause is a nonpartisan, non-profit citizens' lobby that has worked to improve the way Connecticut's government operates since 1971. Common Cause in Connecticut has a strong history of working to increase transparency in government and advocating for the removal of the corrosive influence of special interest money in government and politics. We have more than 7,500 members and activists in Connecticut. **We have a sincere interest in insuring that all of Connecticut's residents have an opportunity to maintain their right to live without fear of undue police brutality, no matter their race.**

I offer testimony in support of the following bills:

SB 0652 AAC the Investigation of the Use of Deadly Force by a Peace Officer That Results in the Death of a Person

SB 1109 AAC Excessive Use of Force

The fatal shooting of young, unarmed, African American Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, Malik Jones in East Haven, Connecticut, fatal choking of Eric Garner in Staten Island, New York, and the deaths of so many others has prompted a national debate over the use of excessive force by police, especially toward people of color. Michael Brown, Malik Jones, and Eric Garner are not alone – press coverage of unarmed individuals shot or otherwise harmed by police have seemed non-stop since the Ferguson incident in August 2014. People of color have years of stories of police violence toward themselves or their loved ones. Over the past decade, 18 unarmed people have died at the hands of police in Connecticut. 77% of whom were Black or Latino (a 19th unarmed individual was killed by police by taser on Sunday, March 19 in Branford)ⁱ. None of these killings resulted in any of the police being found guilty of a crime to date.ⁱⁱ Whether or not any of these individuals had done anything wrong in the pursuit of their duties as a police officer, and whether or not the investigations were without bias is immaterial when public perception is that of fundamental injustice.

Living in persistent fear takes a large toll on families and communities. By definition, living in fear obstructs one's civil liberties, particularly the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Democracy is not possible for people living in fear. In fact, people of color,

especially young African American men have reason to be fearful. In Ferguson, Missouri, which has acted as a flashpoint for unrest in the nation, half of the Black young men who should be present are missing from the community. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are two young Black women in Ferguson for every young Black man.ⁱⁱⁱ While the levels of missing men in Ferguson are particularly severe, similar numbers of individuals are missing right here in Hartford. Incarceration is the largest reason why these young men are absent from their communities – in numbers vastly larger than their white counterparts. Not only does this increase the level of fear felt by members of these communities when dealing with police, but so many missing Black men reduces the number who could become police officers themselves – thereby increasing the number of police officers of color in neighborhoods they call home. This should be another goal in the pursuit of healing communities.

Both of these bills would require that investigation of deaths in police custody be performed by individuals from outside of the judicial district where the death occurred, something we absolutely support. SB 1109 takes the additional step of requiring a body camera for all officers in Connecticut. We concur with the ACLU about the importance of state-wide standards regarding when the cameras will be turned on and off. Appointing investigators from outside of the community where a death in the hands of police occurred would avoid any conflict of interest, perceived or real, caused by relationships between investigators and police. The addition of a body camera may increase the confidence of the public that they are less likely to suffer abuse at the hands of a police officer who knows his actions are being filmed.

We are in a new era where we need to be equally vigilant about systemic discrimination. Communities must be able to hold police officers accountable who have violated an individual's civil rights or taken a life. We are facing a culture of increasing fear of police, especially among people of color. Each time we hear a news report or hear from a family about their loved one - yet another unarmed Black or Latino man being shot and killed by police or being beat up for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, the American Dream.

We urge you to pass the bills noted above so that Connecticut can lead the way to changing this culture of distrust and fear. We hope these bills will help improve the relationships that police officers have with their communities, and lessen the fear that a person of color feels at the mere sight of an officer of the law, thereby making police work safer for both civilians and officers alike.

ⁱ <http://www.nhregister.com/general-news/20150316/branford-witnesses-man-hit-3-times-with-taser-before-death>

ⁱⁱ <http://www.courant.com/politics/hc-police-abuse-investigations-20150310-story.html?dssReturn>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://www.forbes.com/sites/modeledbehavior/2015/03/18/half-of-fergusons-young-african-american-men-are-missing/>