CCDLA
"Ready in the Defense of Liberty"
Founded 1988

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March 20, 2015

The Honorable Eric D. Coleman
The Honorable William Tong
Chairmen
Joint Committee on Judiciary
Room 2500, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, Connecticut 06106

Re: Raised Bill No. 1104 – An Act Concerning the Militarization of Law Enforcement

Dear Chairmen and Committee Members:

The Connecticut Criminal Defense Lawyers Association (CCDLA) is a statewide organization of over 300 licensed lawyers, in both the public and private sectors, dedicated to defending persons accused of criminal offenses. Founded in 1988, the CCDLA works to improve the criminal justice system by ensuring that the individual rights guaranteed by the Connecticut and United States constitutions are applied fairly and equally and that those rights are not diminished.

The CCDLA supports **Raised Bill 1104, An Act Concerning the Militarization of Law Enforcement**. This proposal would require local police departments to to hold a public hearing regarding their plans submit applications for federal approval and monetary assistance to obtain military-grade weapons and other equipment. One of the most persistent and significant obstacles to the criminal justice system achieving its objectives is the deep distrust of law enforcement in the hearts of many of the neighborhood communities most afflicted by violence and other crimes. The cornerstone of this distrust is the perception — all too frequently grounded in innumerable specific instances over the course of many decades — that individuals within police departments view themselves as "at war" with the residents of certain neighborhoods. Closed-door decisions to further escalate the "militarization" of police departments can only grow that perception and potentially make already tense encounters far more deadly. The danger to the clients whom the membership of CCDLA represents is not only the increased risk of a lethal encounter with law enforcement but also the deepening of distrust that impairs the willingness of the community to come forth with information that may exculpate the wrongly accused. The public hearing requirement in RB 1104 would both enhance the transparency and accountability of local police departments and provide an opportunity for those departments to engage in dialog with the communities they serve.

RB 1104 further provides that departments must submit a detailed annual report to the Criminal

Justice Policy and Planning Division within the Office of Policy and Management indicating any incidents in which police deployed military-grade weapons and equipment. Beyond the obvious benefit of improved transparency and accountability, these reports will offer a segue to discussion and insight at a policy-making level regarding the circumstances surrounding the use of such weapons and equipment and whether those deployment decisions were properly motivated. Such insights can subsequently form the basis for training and other policy improvements that may ultimately benefit the safety of the residents of many neighborhoods as well as their willingness to cooperate with law enforcement in the future.

The CCDLA urges the passage of Raised Bill 1104 for all the reasons stated above. If you have any questions regarding this testimony please feel free to contact me.

Respectfully submitted,

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