

First I would like to thank Public Health Committee Co-Chair Rep. Matt Ritter. Rep. Ritter has worked with the Community Party on police reform since he was a Hartford city councilman, long before this issue exploded nationally. We support H.B. No. 5271 AN ACT CONCERNING MENTAL HEALTH TRAINING IN STATE AND LOCAL POLICE TRAINING PROGRAMS AND THE AVAILABILITY OF PROVIDERS OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES ON AN ON-CALL BASIS. This bill is a start, but we also want our original draft language restored to this legislation. We want officers to receive a minimum of 30 hours of training in dealing with mentally ill individuals and people in crisis, along with yearly 4 hour refresher courses. The bill should include language regarding individuals experiencing an emotional or physical crisis. This would provide protection for someone involved in a domestic dispute, or who is suicidal or suffering the effects of drug intoxication, which is currently a priority issue at the State Capitol due to the prescription drug/heroin epidemic. Dispatchers should find out if children are present, so they can be compassionately removed from the scene. This is where having a mental health professional partnering with police officers on patrols on a full time basis would be beneficial. Pilot programs utilizing this concept have been successful in the United Kingdom (described as triage patrols) and Canada.

We named our bill in honor of Meagan Hockaday, who was fatally shot last year by Oxnard, California police officer Roger Garcia in front of her children. Garcia was responding to a domestic dispute call and had already shot another woman who called police for help. Garcia has not been charged. We want enhanced criminal penalties for officers who use excessive force against mentally ill individuals and people in crisis, including whenever children are present. Police in the U.K. killed 1 person in 2014, 0 in 2013. Police in Canada killed 14 people in 2014. Police in China, a dictatorship whose population is 4 1/2 times the size of the United States, killed 12 people in 2014. Police in the U.S. killed 1,051 people in 2013 and 1,134 in 2014. Police killings increased, despite a year of national protests. Police in this country kill more people than all other industrialized nations COMBINED. <https://hendu39.wordpress.com/meagan-hockaday-act/> This is not a time for mild, incremental change. Statistics and a cursory Google search show that there is a crisis level problem with policing in this country that has been ongoing for decades, compared to the rest of the world. Radical policy changes are necessary, in order to save lives. Training is not enough. ACCOUNTABILITY is the essential ingredient to these changes. We must dismantle and reform the system that protects police officers who commit murder, while officers who speak up against racism, brutality and corruption are run off the force.

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