

## **Written Testimony Supporting Proposed House Bill 7285, An Act Concerning Complaints That Allege Misconduct By Law Enforcement Agency Personnel**

Senator Doyle, Senator Kissel, Representative Tong and distinguished members of the Joint Committee on Judiciary:

My name is Heather Reid and I am proud to call myself a resident of New London, Connecticut. I am also a recent immigrant to the United States. I am providing my testimony in support of Proposed House Bill 7285, which intends to ensure compliance with the provisions of section 7-294bb of the Connecticut general statutes concerning the acceptance, processing and investigation of a complaint from a member of the public to alleged misconduct committed by law enforcement agency personnel.

In 2009, I was a civilian member with the Ontario Provincial Police, Professional Standards Bureau - Prosecutions section. My function was to serve as the paralegal of a three-member team that dealt with the most serious of complaints brought forward towards fellow members of our service. I also sat on the Ontario Chiefs of Police Committee on Police Complaints. The year 2009 is significant and relevant to this matter before you because it was the year that the Office of the Independent Police Review Director was created and the standardization of police complaints was established in Ontario.

The Ontario Provincial Police is one of many law enforcement agencies in the province. It is just over 100 years old and roughly employs the equivalent number of personnel of all law enforcement agencies in Connecticut combined; it is the largest law enforcement agency in Canada (larger than the RCMP) and serves every community in the province in some capacity. Ontario is approximately 70 times the size of Connecticut, contains 10 million more people and has over 100 languages spoken. Southern Ontario is home to the fourth largest city in North America and has the busiest highway in the world, stretching over 500 miles east to west. The most northern community served by the Ontario Provincial Police is Moosonee which is found on the shores of James Bay and is located 100 miles north of the last road. It is only accessible by rail and plane. I share these facts so you have an understanding of the complexities of issues faced everyday by our organization.

As a member of the Prosecutions section, some of the tasks assigned to me were to review complaints and statements, coordinate hearings, prepare all legal notices and arrange for their service, prepare disclosure documentation, speak with witnesses and complainants and aid in preparing them to testify, assist in pre-hearings and hearings and to review the personnel files of members to prepare a summary for submission before the tribunal adjudicating the complaint against them.

I was very proud of the work we did. We strove to create a system of transparency so the public would have faith in our investigation and disciplinary process. We understood that good policing can only happen when the public has our trust. This trust is only earned when they know that their voices are being heard and that complaints could be lodged without fear.

While we strived for this system, we were not perfect, nor were the many other law enforcement agencies that exist in the province. The government recognized that regardless of our intentions more needed to be done. An independent agency was introduced along with a standardized form to promote more consistent investigations and resolutions of complaints with the goal of raising public confidence in all communities. They recognized that the diversity of the Ontario population required a form available in many languages

that could be submitted directly to them or in any police station across the province. They also recognized that better metrics could be gathered and acted upon to provide resources and raise the standard of law enforcement where needed.

It is this experience that leads me now to urge you to amend and pass H.B. 7285. I am adamant in my conviction that the following three amendments are in the best interests of the people of Connecticut and the law enforcement community:

1. Establishing meaningful penalties for law enforcement agencies that do not comply with state complaint acceptance and investigation laws;
2. The creation of a standardized complaint form that is compliant with best practices and translated into all commonly-spoken languages in Connecticut; and
3. Require law enforcement agencies to track complaint data and to annually report specific complaint information to the Connecticut Office of Policy and Management.

There are certain members of society we give a higher level of our trust. Those can be teachers, doctors or police officers. There is nothing more devastating when that trust is betrayed. The courage that it takes to speak out and seek justice can be unimaginable in some cases, so it is imperative that changes be made to ensure that every voice is heard and that courage is met with listening ears that will take action to right a wrong.

To law enforcement agencies in this state willing to be transparent I thank them for taking the difficult road. To those that do not see the need I say the following:

- Complaints serve as an opportunity to learn and to develop new training and to provide corrective action so that officers become better. You cannot learn from a mistake if you are not told about it.
- The term Police Officer is synonymous with Peace Officer. Officers are there to restore the peace. They wear many hats including social worker, psychologist, mediator, mentor, teacher, and listener. These are very important tools of the job but they cannot utilize them if they do not have the trust of the public.
- Complaints can be a warning sign. An officer with a stellar record suddenly the subject of a complaint may be suffering from a mental condition. PTSD remains a condition that is hard to seek help for and performance issues are often the first inkling that someone is in trouble.
- With a consistent complaint system and transparency in the investigative process, the public can be confident that every outcome is just and an officer that was cleared of any misdoing deserved to be cleared.
- Every officer deserves to know that the people they work with also hold the badge they wear with equal reverence and will execute their duties in the same manner that they do.

In closing, I urge the members of this committee to consider my words and amend and support the passage of Proposed House Bill 7285. Thank you for your consideration.

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