

Honorable members of the Public Safety and Security Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written public testimony to you for consideration relating to HB 5156. Having served as a police executive in two (2) municipal police departments, I have seen first-hand the significant negative impact that a lack of training can have upon a police interaction. I appreciate you taking the time to review this testimony.

Among the most difficult calls which police officers must respond to are those that involve persons in a crisis or affected by mental illness, intellectual disabilities, or developmental disabilities including Autism. It is no secret that the number of interactions between police officers and these members of our communities have been increasing in recent years both in Connecticut and across the nation. The Center for Disease Control cites that about 1 in 59 children have been identified with autism spectrum disorder¹ and we know that approximately 1 in 5 adults experience mental illness in a given year². As first responders, police, fire, and EMS personnel are traditionally the first to respond to these crisis situations; we need to ensure that they have the proper training to recognize, approach, and address these interactions safely and successfully. In most cases, individuals with autism spectrum disorder and/or nonverbal learning disorder will exhibit difficulties understanding and complying with verbal commands, they may flee, they may actively resist medical treatment, and their responses may reflect the changes in their sensory perception to lights, sirens, uniforms, stimuli; in some instances these responses may even escalate the individual's behavior. Adoption of this proposed bill is a proactive step for first responders towards successful approaches and long-term positive change.

I welcome any opportunity to appear before the committee or otherwise meet with your membership to elaborate and/or clarify this testimony and police encounters with those living with mental illness, developmental disability, or intellectual disability.

Respectfully Submitted,

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¹ Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "Data and Statistics on Autism Spectrum Disorder", <https://www.cdc.gov/ncbddd/autism/data.html>.

² IACP, Improving Police Response to Persons Affected by Mental Illness (March 2016), <https://www.theiacp.org/sites/default/files/2018-08/ImprovingPoliceResponsetoPersonswithMentalIllnessSymposiumReport.pdf>.