TOWN OF VERNON

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TESTIMONY OF
SERGEANT ROBERT MARRA, VERNON POLICE DEPARTMENT
SERGEANT TODD THIEL, VERNON POLICE DEPARTMENT
MICHAEL J. PURCARO, TOWN ADMINISTRATOR, TOWN OF VERNON
BEFORE THE PUBLIC SAFETY AND SECURITY COMMITTEE

Thursday, March 7th, 2019

SB870, An Act Concerning the use of Drones by Law Enforcement

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Senator Bradley, Representative Verrengia, Senator Osten, Representative Paolillo and members of the Public Safety and Security Committee, we would like to thank you for the opportunity to present testimony regarding SB870 on behalf of the Town of Vernon.

Sergeant Robert Marra is a thirteen year veteran of the Vernon Police Department. He is currently a Patrol Supervisor and oversees the department's Communications Division, which includes the local public safety dispatching center. Sgt. Marra has served as a Community Police Officer and has worked with the East Central Narcotics Task Force. He has received multiple commendations and citations for his service. Sgt. Marra is a Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) licensed drone pilot and he currently serves as the Chief Pilot for the Vernon Police Department's SUAS - Small Unmanned Aircraft Systems (Drone) program.

Sergeant Todd Thiel is a seventeen year veteran of the Vernon Police Department. He currently serves as the Supervisor of the department's Planning and Training Division and has expertise in the instruction of firearms and use-of-force. Sgt. Thiel has served in both the Detective and Patrol Divisions. He has received multiple commendations and citations for his service. Sgt. Thiel is a FAA licensed drone pilot.

Mr. Michael Purcaro serves as the Town Administrator for the Town of Vernon and is the Town's Emergency and Risk Management Director. Mr. Purcaro has expertise in public administration, public health, public safety, and public education. Over the past twenty-two years, he has served in executive management positions in the private sector as well as at the local, state, and federal levels of government.

The Vernon Police Department is proud to be a leader in the use of drone technology for public safety purposes within the State of Connecticut. We partner, work collaboratively, and train with other police departments and risk-management agencies to develop policies and procedures that establish best practices for the use of drones. Our drone program has been called upon to search

for missing persons, locate criminal suspects, and to assist in the recovery of endangered people. Our program has assisted with high-risk arrests and search warrants, and has been used to reconstruct motor vehicle accidents. We have worked with regional law enforcement agencies to provide real-time data for incident commanders that has been used to assist with officer safety and to support field operations. In addition, we have responded to calls from neighboring fire departments, animal control departments, regional dive teams, and the Connecticut State Police.

The FAA estimates that hobbyist and commercial drone fleets will to grow to over 2.85 million aircraft and that there will be 301,000 licensed drone pilots by 2022. Drones are becoming mainstream in today's society. For example, news stations utilize drone technology to obtain video of current events as they unfold. Utility companies use drones to inspect powerlines, pipelines, and support structures. Drones are also used by the agricultural and advertising industries as well as by school systems and municipalities for educational purposes and to improve worker safety. Drone technology is evolving daily.

The FAA regulates the certification of drone pilots and has established rules that allow for the safe and efficient use of drone aircraft in the national airspace. The regulations set forth by the FAA for government and commercial use are specific and stringent, including when and where drones may fly. Exceptions to these regulations are made on a case-by-case basis through a formal waiver application process. This process requires a high-level of justification for operational need and applicants must meet specific performance based standards. Examples of federal waivers include flying drone aircraft at night and over non-participating groups of people.

We believe that the use of drone technology is a beneficial tool to protect the residents we serve, aid in public safety service delivery, and enables us to police our communities more effectively and efficiently.

As written, we stand opposed to SB870 because the regulatory requirements are overreaching, unduly burdensome, and counter-productive to the administration of daily police duties. In certain situations, the proposed legislation may restrict our ability to save lives.

Should this legislation move forward, we strongly recommend that a task force be formed to thoroughly evaluate and develop guidelines that give due consideration to both the beneficial uses of drone technology by law enforcement personnel as well as to the established policies and procedures already implemented by many police departments across the State of Connecticut.

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