

Public Safety and Security Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6597

AN ACT CONCERNING ACCREDITATION, REPORTING REQUIREMENTS,
MENTAL HEALTH, DATA STORAGE SERVICES AND TRAINING OF LAW

Title: ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS.

Vote Date: 3/18/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/9/2021

File No.: 310

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Public Safety and Security Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

Currently law enforcement units can only be accredited by one organization. This process can create more expense for municipalities. The proposed legislation revises requirements regarding the accreditation of law enforcement units. Also, the cost to municipalities regarding body-worn equipment as well as the data-storage and services can be quite large, and have an adverse impact on already stressed budgets. The proposed legislation would initiate a study way of lowering costs to municipalities associated with the body-worn equipment and data services. Finally, there have been several incidents of negative police officer's interaction with persons with mental and physical disabilities. These negative interactions can sometimes lead to unnecessary violence to these persons with disabilities. This bill would require members of law enforcement to receive training in their interactions with persons with disabilities, which could ultimately led to better experiences for the officers and the persons of disabilities.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Jason E. Bowsza, First Selectman, Town of East Windsor – The testimony submitted addresses and supports sections 1 and 2 of the bill. Selectman Bowsza believes that allowing communities to utilize POST-C as an alternate for accreditation (other than CALEA) is a positive step, He notes that East Windsor has spent two years working with POST-C, including having their outside field inspection completed. He feels that having this alternative

will allow for time, effort, and resources invested by local police departments to be utilized and not wasted.

Marc Pelka, Undersecretary of Criminal Justice Policy and Planning, Office of Policy and Management – The testimony submitted addresses Section 7 of the proposed legislation which deals with reimbursement percentages for body-worn cameras and all associated systems. Section 7 of the bill would strike the percentage recently created by Public Act 20-1, which may lead to an overall decrease in reimbursement. The testimony recommends the retaining of the original language of Public Act 20-1 for priority funding of our distressed municipalities.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities – The testimony submitted supports the proposed legislation. The Commission protects individuals with mental disabilities and has an interest in ensuring these individuals' civil rights are upheld while experiencing a crisis. Across our nation we have witnessed the fatal consequences of inadequate safeguards and training when someone calls 911 for psychiatric assistance and loses their life in the process. Of the approximately, 5,000 fatal police shootings over the past six years, about 25% involved someone in a mental health crisis. Continued training in this area will lead to a de-escalation of violence when residents are receiving assistance in a mental health crisis.

Betsy Gara, Executive Director, Connecticut Council of Small Towns – The testimony submitted supports HB 6597. Ms. Gara supports the use of either COST or CALEA for law enforcement accreditation. She notes that while some towns have received CALEA accreditation it is more costly initially and the towns are required to incur substantial expenses annually to maintain accreditation. The testimony also indicates support for an effort to develop a training curriculum to ensure police officers are appropriately trained when interacting with individuals with mental or physical disabilities. Lastly, the testimony favors identifying any areas where cost savings may be found for the use of body-worn cameras and all corresponding storage costs.

Sal Luciano, President, Connecticut AFL-CIO – The testimony submitted addresses and supports section 3 of the proposed legislation. He notes that research shows that the job of a police officer may be injurious to one's mental health. Section 3 of this bill prevents a police officer from being terminated or discriminated against based on the outcome of a mental health examination.

Mike Muszynski, State and Federal Relations Manager, Connecticut Conference of Municipalities – The written testimony supports the proposed legislation. It was noted that while CALEA may be the premier accreditation some of the smaller departments have a difficult time meeting facility condition requirements. By having a second accreditation program other than CALEA, more flexibility is then available for some of the smaller local police departments to meet the necessary standards while complying with the spirit of the law.

Police Officers Association of Connecticut – The submitted testimony addresses section 3 of the bill and indicates support. Mid-career police officers are now required to undergo mental and behavioral assessments under the Police Accountability Act, PA 20-1 of the July Special Session. This legislation denies the officers from being disciplined, terminated or discriminated against based on the outcome of these evaluations. These protections allow police officers to speak freely in these assessments.

Louise Pyers, M.S., B.E.C.T.S., Executive Director, CT Alliance to Benefit Law Enforcement (CABLE)– This testimony supports the legislation and notes some of the work that CABLE has been performing in the addressing of law enforcement mental health issues since 2002. CABLE has provided mental health training to municipal, state and federal law enforcement agencies, as well as colleges and universities.

Jeff Reimer, President – Public Safety Council, AFSCME Council 4 – The written testimony supports the proposed legislation. Mr. Reimer addresses the new regulation regarding mid-career mental and behavioral assessments. His testimony references the fact that a police officers job can be injurious to their mental health and agrees with the legislation that officers should not be disciplined, terminated or discriminated against after their mental and behavioral health examination. He would also like to see additional legislation regarding the workers compensation tie-in to this new required examination.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

There was none submitted.

Reported by: Richard O'Neil

Date: 4/7/2021