



Legislative Testimony
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Written Testimony Supporting House Bill 5381, An Act Concerning the Use of Police Body-Worn Recording Equipment

Good day Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, ranking members Senators Kissel and Representative Fishbein, and all the members of the Judiciary Committee.

My name is Terri Ricks, I live in Hartford, and I am a Smart Justice Leader with the ACLU of Connecticut. I am here to testify in support of House Bill 5381, An Act Concerning the Use of Police Body-Worn Recording Equipment.

I have to describe an experience I once had: it was a 90-degree day and my friends and I were driving down to the beach. We were pulled over by the police in downtown Hartford for absolutely no reason, we were ordered out of the car, told to lay down on the ground, and the officers started yelling at us. They kept us on the ground for 10 minutes, and it was so frustrating and embarrassing because we had done nothing wrong and there was no reason for the police to be treating us this way. Eventually they released us, and we were able to continue on to the beach, but it was not the same. The police had done that to embarrass us, to demonstrate power, to show they had the upper hand. But how could I prove it without a body camera and the audio of what the police said to us?

Another example was once when we were in Sands, which is a housing complex on Main Street in the North End, and police showed up in the city buses. The police body-slammed us onto our cars, handcuffed us and tried to question us. They were trying to get some information out of me, but even more it was like they were trying to antagonize me with profanity and threats and demeaning insults. The police sat

us on the curb like we were show ponys, like we were on a stage because they were trying to embarrass us in front of our community. There was no reason to do it except for their own satisfaction and to instill dominance. But I could never prove it because it would have been my word against their word, and the police officer's word is always going to be taken over mine. And this was not an unusual event. This was part of our daily lives.

This bill is important to me because if body cameras are truly going to be effective tools for oversight, transparency and most importantly trying to establish community trust (if that will ever be possible), they have to be paired with policies and procedures that accomplish those goals. Otherwise, they risk becoming just another surveillance device that records some things but not all things.

That's like writing a book with no narrative, or a movie without a script. A story can't be told with eyesight alone. We can't understand the story without the voices.

If you're not doing anything wrong, if it's being done by the book, why should it have to be done in secrecy? We should all be able to see and hear what is going on. Otherwise, we can only assume that something is being hidden.

HB 5381 would require the police to review their training programs on the use of body-cameras and recording equipment, and to update their guidelines to include the circumstance under which police officer shall not mute their body cameras. I support HB 5381 and urge the members of this committee to do the same.