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Written Testimony in Opposition to Section 3 of House Bill 5420, An Act Concerning Mental Health Needs of and Services for Police Officers, Certain Requirements Regarding Police Training and Certain Reports

Senator Osten, Representative Horn, Ranking Members Champagne and Howard, and distinguished members of the Public Safety and Security Committee:

My name is Jess Zaccagnino, and I am the policy counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am here to testify in opposition to Section 3 of House Bill 5420, An Act Concerning Mental Health Needs of and Services for Police Officers, Certain Requirements Regarding Police Training and Certain Reports.

Contact between community members and police can have tragic consequences for people experiencing mental health crises.¹ People who are in mental health crises need treatment. As such, public health and social work actors should be the ones to take the lead when addressing mental health crises, not as an auxiliary afterthought to police. Rather than continue to entrench the role of police in mental health, this Committee should seek to divest police from this function entirely.

We have concerns with House Bill 5420 because of its failure to reduce the role of policing in our communities, particularly with regard to some of our most vulnerable residents when they are in need of medical care for a mental health crisis. As such, we encourage this Committee to re-evaluate its centering of police in mental health care entirely and shift its focus to the use of mental health professionals in crisis interventions.

¹ See, e.g., *If You Are Black and in a Mental Health Crisis, 911 Can Be a Death Sentence*, INTERCEPT (Sept. 29, 2019), available at <https://theintercept.com/2019/09/29/police-shootings-mental-health/>.