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Written Testimony in Opposition to Section 2 of House Bill 5372, An Act Permitting Clinical Social Workers to Conduct Periodic Behavioral Health Assessments of Police Officers and Promoting the Increased Use of Clinical Social Workers By Law Enforcement Units When Issuing Emergency Certificates

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Ranking Members Kissel and Fishbein, and distinguished members of the Judiciary 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 2 of House Bill 5372, An Act Permitting Clinical Social Workers to Conduct Periodic Behavioral Health Assessments of Police Officers and Promoting the Increased Use of Clinical Social Workers By Law Enforcement Units When Issuing Emergency Certificates.

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 significant concerns with House Bill 5372 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.

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/>.

As such, we encourage this Committee to re-evaluate its centering of police in mental health care entirely and shift its focus to mental health professionals, like social workers.