



Legislative Testimony
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**Written Testimony Opposing Senate Bill 1036, An Act Establishing a
Greater Hartford Regional Law Enforcement Task Force to Combat Illegal
Roadway Activity**

Senator Gaston, Representative Boyd, Ranking Members Cicarella and Howard, and distinguished members of the Public Safety Committee:

My name is Jess Zaccagnino, and I am the policy counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am writing to testify in opposition to Senate Bill 1036, An Act Establishing a Greater Hartford Regional Law Enforcement Task Force to Combat Illegal Roadway Activity.

The ACLU-CT believes that due to systemic racism in policing across the country, the most effective way to keep communities of color safe from overpolicing and police violence is to reimagine the role of police. That includes reducing the role, responsibilities, and presence of police, especially in Black and brown communities. It also requires taking funds currently spent on policing and reallocating them into programs and expenditures that build safe and healthy communities.

The most frequent way that police come into contact with community members is through traffic enforcement.¹ As with many types of policing, traffic enforcement disproportionately impacts Black and brown people.² And far too many encounters that begin as traffic stops end with Black people dead at the hands of police.³ In

¹ *Traffic Stops*, BUREAU OF JUSTICE STATISTICS (accessed Feb. 22, 2023), <https://www.bjs.gov/index.cfm?tid=702&ty=tp>.

² Erik Ortiz, *Inside 100 Million Police Stops: New Evidence of Racial Bias*, NBC (Mar. 13, 2019), <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/inside-100-million-police-traffic-stops-new-evidence-racial-bias-n980556>.

³ Wesley Lowery, *A Disproportionate Number of Black Victims in Fatal Traffic Stops*, WASH. POST (Dec. 24, 2015), https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/a-disproportionate-number-of-black-victims-in-fatal-traffic-stops/2015/12/24/c29717e2-a344-11e5-9c4e-be37f66848bb_story.html.

Connecticut, the concern over disparate traffic enforcement was so great that the Alvin W. Penn Racial Profiling Prohibition Act was enacted in 1999,⁴ leading to many types of relief including annual reporting on traffic stop disparities across the state.⁵ A report from the Connecticut Racial Profiling Prohibition Project, for stops in 2018, indicates that Connecticut has made strides toward reducing racial disparities in traffic stops, but that drivers of color were stopped in disparate numbers and were much more likely to be searched than white drivers, despite being less likely to have contraband discovered during a search.⁶

Because of the disparities in traffic enforcement, and especially because of the unreasonably high danger that traffic stops pose to drivers of color, the legislature should be very careful when making new traffic infractions. Every new law that police enforce through traffic stops creates a new opportunity for police interactions, each of which creates a dangerous situation for a driver of color stopped. Thus, we believe that creating new traffic infractions should be weighed very carefully. If there are already laws on the books which would cover new infractions, those existing laws should be used. If there is no mechanism for enforcing the contemplated behavior, the legislature should weigh very carefully whether the public safety needs to enforce the traffic regulation outweigh the public safety needs to limit police traffic stops.

Among the most vulnerable people who become enmeshed in the criminal legal system are young people under the age of eighteen, who suffer unique harms due to their involvement in the criminal legal system and are more likely to experience even wider racial disparities than exists for adults.⁷ The ACLU-CT is committed to ending police violence and racism in policing in all forms. In addition to accountability

⁴ Conn. Public Act. 99-198 (1999).

⁵ See *Mission Statement*, CONN. RACIAL PROFILING PROHIBITION PROJECT (accessed Feb. 22, 2023) <http://www.ctrp3.org/missionstatement/>.

⁶ See Ken Barone *et al.*, *State of Connecticut Traffic Stop Data Analysis and Findings, 2018*, CONN. RACIAL PROFILING PROHIBITION PROJECT (May 2020), <http://www.ctrp3.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/2018-ConnecticutRacial-Profiling-Report.pdf>.

⁷ Colette Marcellin & Samantha Harvell, *Data Snapshot of Youth Incarceration in Connecticut*, URBAN INST. (May 2020), https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/102176/data-snapshot-ofyouthincarceration-in-connecticut_1.pdf.

measures, Connecticut must also divest from policing and reinvest in programs that build strong and safe communities. Policymakers must reduce policing's responsibilities, scale, and tools to build an equitable future for all people in Connecticut. The ACLU-CT opposes investments and expansion in policing, especially at a time when many in Connecticut are struggling but social services and the root causes of crime remain unaddressed. As such, the ACLU-CT opposes Senate Bill 1036, and urges this Committee to do the same.