



Legislative Testimony

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Written Testimony
Supporting Proposed House Bill 6714,
An Act Concerning the Safe Use of Electronic Defense Weapons by Police Officers

Senators Larson and Guglielmo, Representative Verrengia, and members of the Public Safety and Security Committee. My name is David McGuire, and I am the executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). As an organization committed to defending civil liberties under the U.S. and Connecticut Constitutions, the ACLU-CT strongly supports measures to ensure fair and equitable public safety practices. As a result, I am here to urge you to support and expand proposed bill 6714.

Proposed H.B. 6714 would increase transparency regarding police Taser use. In the process, it would increase community trust in police, which benefits police and community members alike.

In 2014, the General Assembly passed Public Act 14-149, which requires police departments to report each incident of Taser use. In 2016, the Institute of Municipal and Regional Policy at Central Connecticut State University collected and analyzed data from 2015 department reports. The data showed that police officers disproportionately used Tasers on racial minorities and people in mental health crises. In addition, some police departments failed to provide complete information regarding Taser incidents, including in the two cases in which someone died after being tased by police. This demonstrated a clear need for the General Assembly to update Public Act 14-149 to clarify reporting requirements, mandate that police submit underlying incident reports, and require new Tasers to be equipped with Taser cameras.

Police agencies' inconsistent reporting demonstrated the need for clarification and expansion of police Taser transparency requirements. While some departments submitted underlying incident reports with their Taser data, others did not. In addition, some departments appeared to collect their Taser data while information was still fresh, at the same time as their underlying incident and use-of-force reports. Others seemed to attempt to reconstruct their Taser data long after the incident had taken place.

We therefore support proposed H.B. 6714's requirement for police agencies to supply more Taser incident information, including: whether the person involved in the incident was arrested or criminally charged, the condition of the person upon the officer's arrival to the scene and after

the Taser incident, whether the person was transported to a hospital, whether the police officer's supervisor determined that the Taser use was justified, the number and duration of electric shocks, and underlying use-of-force and incident reports. We also support H.B. 6714's mandate for police agencies to complete Taser incident reports at the same time as the underlying use-of-force and incident reports.

While we support H.B. 6714's language allowing municipalities to seek reimbursement for Tasers equipped with cameras, we respectfully encourage amending the bill to require all new Tasers purchased after the bill's effective date to be equipped with Taser cameras. We also encourage the committee to consider amending H.B. 6714's language to clarify that municipalities could seek and receive funding to support electronic defense weapon recording equipment through the state's existing body-worn recording equipment fund for police body cameras. As of December 2016, Connecticut still had \$10 million dollars available to municipalities and special police agencies to provide body-worn recording equipment to police departments. This month, the state bond commission approved more than \$870,000 to reimburse municipalities that had purchased body-worn cameras for police. As this fund's purpose is to provide transparency regarding police practices, we believe that municipalities should also be able to seek reimbursement through this funding stream for Taser cameras.

With these proposed amendments in place, H.B. 6714 would clarify and streamline the Taser reporting process while creating more transparency about police Taser use. In the process, it would provide police agencies with an opportunity to build public trust, and members of the public with a greater ability to ensure police accountability. We urge you to please support this bill.