



Legislative Testimony
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**Written Testimony Supporting
House Bill 5757, An Act Expediting Investigations of
Officer-Involved Shootings That Result in Death**

Senator Bradley, Representative Verrengia, and distinguished members of the Public Safety and Security Committee:

My name is David McGuire, and I am executive director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 5757, An Act Expediting Investigations of Officer-Involved Shootings That Result in Death.

As an organization that values justice, fairness, and equal treatment under the law, the ACLU-CT strongly supports measures to ensure that police are transparent and accountable to the communities they serve. Democracy depends on police systems that treat people fairly, justly, and wisely. Building these systems requires transparency about interactions between the public and police and, in particular, about interactions that result in the death of a member of the public. Officer-involved shootings that result in death should be thoroughly investigated, but those investigations should have a deadline to ensure that families and friends of victims, as well as the public, have the information they need and deserve about what happened to their loved one.

Police-involved shootings that result in death undermine public trust in law enforcement, and lack of police accountability further erodes it. Families are suffering because of the lack of police transparency and accountability. The public and victims' families are kept in the dark about police behavior. In Connecticut, family members and friends of people killed by police, and the public, wait an average of 14 months for the release of an investigative final public report on a fatal shooting incident. Some families have been forced to wait three years to learn what happened to their loved one. Families of people killed by police should not have to go to court or fight to find out what happened to their loved ones.

When the government kills someone, the public should be able to see any video and information to gauge for themselves what happened. Yet police departments in Connecticut are not consistently and quickly releasing complete video footage when police kill people, even to the family of victims of fatal police uses of force. Police departments invoke "investigative privilege" as a basis for withholding body camera footage from the public when a police officer is suspected of wrongdoing, yet they allow the police officer to view the footage before writing a report.

Recent high-profile incidents in Connecticut have shown the need for instituting a deadline for investigations of these incidents. In New Britain, for example, police have refused for more than a year to release footage and information about Zoe Dowdell's death at the hands of police to Dowdell's family. New Britain police killed Zoe Dowdell in 2017, and in 2019, they still have not released all information to his family. Jayson Negron's family and friends, as well as the public, waited over eight months to learn what happened when the 15-year-old was killed by a police officer in Bridgeport in 2017.

For these families, the family and friends of future victims of fatal police shootings, and Connecticut residents, prosecutors should be required to release results of investigations within a reasonable amount of time. According to one recent national poll, nearly half of Americans believe that police are generally not held accountable for misconduct. Communities are watching, and they deserve police forces that fairly, justly, and wisely protect and respect all people.

We strongly encourage the committee to support House Bill 5757.