



Legislative Testimony
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Written Testimony Opposing Senate Bill 939, An Act Providing Immunity from Civil Liability to a Physician Who Accompanies and Assists a State, Regional or Municipal SWAT Team

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Ranking Members Kissel and Fishbein, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Kelly McConney Moore, and I am the interim senior policy counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am submitting this testimony in opposition to Senate Bill 939, An Act Providing Immunity from Civil Liability to a Physician Who Accompanies and Assists a State, Regional or Municipal SWAT Team.

The ACLU-CT believes that highly militarized policing should be defunded in favor of investing those funds into the programs, resources, and services that truly create stable, healthy, and safe communities. Highly militarized police units, like SWAT teams, turn communities into war zones. Neighborhoods are not battlegrounds and no arm of the government should be treating us like wartime enemies. Despite that, militarized units have proliferated across Connecticut¹ and they are now inappropriately deployed frequently.² Connecticut must divest from this type of policing, rather than encouraging it.

Unfortunately, by offering incentives – like civil immunity – to community members who work with militarized police, policies like Senate Bill 939 encourage proliferation

¹ See, e.g., Radley Balko, “Small-town SWAT teams proliferate in Western Massachusetts.” Washington Post, Nov. 13, 2017, *available at* <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/the-watch/wp/2017/11/13/small-town-swat-teams-proliferate-in-western-massachusetts/>.

² See, e.g., Rob Ryser, “Local police well-armed with surplus military equipment.” Stamford Advocate, Aug. 30, 2014, *available at* <https://www.stamfordadvocate.com/local/article/Local-police-well-armed-with-surplus-military-5724525.php>; see also MariAn Gail Brown, “A costly SWAT raid gone wrong.” CT Post, Feb. 23, 2013, *available at* <https://www.ctpost.com/local/article/A-costly-SWAT-raid-gone-wrong-4303215.php>.

and overuse of SWAT teams. Civil immunity is also inappropriate in the sweeping scenarios proposed by this bill, where even obvious negligence would be excused. It is also unclear whether this bill is targeted at bystanders who offer medical assistance when they observe emergencies – which would already be covered by Connecticut’s good Samaritan statute³ – or whether it is intended to protect people who ride along with SWAT teams in some sort of volunteer program. This ambiguity highlights that there is no clear problem that this bill is trying to solve.

Militarized police harms communities and people and they should be defunded, not prioritized through sweetheart immunity deals for collaborators. Senate Bill 939 does just that. Accordingly, the ACLU-CT opposes it and urges this Committee to oppose it as well.

³ See Conn. Gen. Stats. § 52-557b (2020).