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Written Testimony on Increasing Criminal Justice Commission Line Item Budget

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Ranking Member Miner, Ranking Member France, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Jess Zaccagnino, and I am the policy counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am submitting this testimony urging this committee to increase the Criminal Justice Commission's line item budget to adequately cover the costs of exercising their statutory powers, which include conducting national searches to fill state's attorney, deputy chief state's attorney, and chief state's attorney vacancies, and conduct division investigations.ⁱ This line item budget is currently housed within the Division of Criminal Justice's overall operating budget.ⁱⁱ

The ACLU-CT believes that mass incarceration is the liberation struggle that defines our era in U.S. history. We believe that everyone has a role to play in ending the pervasive system of mass incarceration. That is especially true of people operating within the criminal legal system, like state's attorneys, whose decisions can either perpetuate mass incarceration or begin to work towards a different model of justice. Prosecutors are some of the most powerful actors in the criminal legal system and among the least accountable to the public. For a long time, prosecution was a black box, shielding prosecutors' decisions from scrutiny and insulating prosecutors. Connecticut began to shine a light on prosecutorial transparency through the data

collected pursuant to P.A. 19-59, but our judicial districts operate independently of one another with little oversight.

While the Criminal Justice Commission (CJC) oversees the weighty task of appointing all state prosecutors employed by the Division of Criminal Justice, it operates on a shoestring budget with limited power. The ACLU-CT envisions a CJC that is independent from the Division of Criminal Justice, with stronger disciplinary mechanisms and sufficient funding to evaluate state's attorneys and conduct investigations into any prosecutorial misconduct. With this potential growth in power comes the need to ensure the CJC's budget is structured to match this expansion. Adequate funding is critical as the CJC prepares to conduct a national search to appoint the state's next chief state's attorney. The ACLU-CT urges this Committee to bolster the CJC's independence and facilitate robust appointment searches by increasing its line item budget.

ⁱ See Conn. Gen. Stat. §§ 51-275a, 51-278, 51-278b.

ⁱⁱ See *Criminal Justice Commission*, Dept. Administrative Services, available at: <https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/DAS/Communications/Communications-List-Docs/Digest/Digest-2020-2021/Criminal-Justice-Commission.pdf> (stating the CJC's operating budget is \$409).