**PTATF Testimonies**

CJST 4430 Students

Department of Criminal Justice, University of New Haven

CJST 4430: Exploring Delinquency

Dr. Danielle Cooper

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**Testimony 1:**

Greetings to all, my name is Adrienne Barnes, I am currently 22 years old and a senior at the University of New Haven studying Criminal Justice with a concentration in Juvenile Justice. I have great interest in working for the Criminal justice system because I want to help make the necessary changes that is needed to properly serve justice in our country. The issue that I wish to speak about is Police Brutality, for it has been an growing problem within our country and is an issue that we should all work together to fix.

As a young black woman I am lucky enough to say that I have not experienced any form of police brutality, but my mother, brother, and father both African American men have both experienced two different forms of police brutality in New York. Now as I stated before I have not personally experienced any forms of police brutality but witnessing it is just as frightening. My brother was accused of brawling in a public restaurant before entering the restaurant because him and the actual suspect were wearing the same sweatshirt, regardless of the fact, the police officers handcuffed my brother and aggressively threw him into the police car causing him to land on his side, my mother witnessing this became very scared and walked up to the officers, standing in the way of them and my brother to ask them to stop being so aggressive, they then pushed my mom out the way causing her the fall as she got back up she continued to scream they then punched her, my brother then began to scream begging them to not touch my mother so aggressively, that’s when the second officer elbowed my brother in his face, my aunt then tried

speaking with the officers and they pinned her against the car and arrested her as well.

As far as my dad he was stopped for no reason, pulled out the car and searched by six officers, when asked why they are searching him the officers continued to bad mouth him telling him to “Shut the f\*\*\* up” my dad then asked told them that my brother, my sister and I were in the car scared and told them that he has no guns or drugs on him for them to search him, again the same officer told him the same thing. Before getting arrested, we were driving home from the rental shop and rented a car for my dad to drive out of state for my brother AAU basketball game, once the police officers finished searching my dad, we looked in the trunk and found a plastic bag with broken clothing buzzers which one of the six police officers had just planted in the car, my dad just threw them in the garbage just to get pulled over and searched again within 10 min after throwing out the buzzers.

Moral of the story police officers should have better training on how to properly handle certain situations. With that being said, though we all know from statistics that police brutality targets black African Americans, I also feel as though the uniform or more specifically their power, causes them to act a certain way. This causes them to act as if they’re more superior than others. I feel as though the best way to get police to learn from their actions is to obviously take accountability. Not just for unlawful actions but for making citizens feel unsafe or disrespected as well. Police can either mail a heartfelt letter to someone who make a complain expressing their sympathy also explaining how they can change their behavior. Now of course anything that is done unlawfully should definitely result in a more harsh punishment. To better the police and society relationship police must take accountability for all of their actions not just the severe ones.

To conclude, I want to thank the Task Force for listening to my testimony and giving me the opportunity to speak up about this issue. I will now answer any question that you guys have for me.

**Testimony 2:**

Esteemed Panel, My name is Marita Galliher and I am a 21 year old criminal justice major at the University of New Haven. Simply put, law enforcement has an image problem in our society. Just by a simple Google search, you can find a countless amount of videos exhibiting police brutality, which disproportionately targets minorities. Police brutality has long been a problem in our country, it just seems like a bigger issue now because of the increased access to cameras. Nearly every adult has a camera phone, able to record at a moment’s notice. They have become a tool to hold police accountable, but it’s time to increase this usage to prevent needless victimization. Police body cameras have been in use for around 20 years now, and have shown significant impacts on conduct. One California study showed a 59% decrease in police force incidents among those who wore body cameras and a staggering 87.5% decrease in citizen complaints against officers who wore body cameras. (Lovett, 2013) Every work place across the United States has a code of conduct, rules that they have to abide by to ensure ethical responsibility. Why should the police be any different? The criminal justice system is an institution that was founded on an interesting power dynamic between a criminal and government entity. Citizens need to feel a balance of power and that law enforcement is actively on their side.

One thing that has struck a chord with me is the way that policing has turned into a highly politicized issue, when in reality it comes down to intersectionality. It has seemingly become an “us versus them” issue. On one side of the aisle there are calls to “defund the police”, in which money would be allocated from police funding towards investing in community programs. While on the other side, people are saying that defunding the police would fundamentally change crime prevention. However, the problem goes further back than that. I believe that this divide comes from an objective lack of understanding of groups seen as the “other.” If there’s an underlying display of disrespect between groups, it would be impossible to fix the problem. One way to help alleviate some of the tensions between the community and

police is to hold an open listening session, where people are welcome to voice their concerns and suggestions about what police can do to help improve their relationship.

It’s important to let everyone feel that they have a voice in enacting change, as unfortunately holding political power is not proportional to the current demographics of the United States. Another way to help promote unity among law enforcement and its citizens is to implement cultural awareness and sensitivity training across the board. It’s times like these where our society stands at a crossroads. We can either choose to further divide or we can spark a new generation of cooperation. I completely understand how police can believe that no one supports them and that this bill is just another way to knock them down a peg. However, the system’s foundation is flawed. If the foundation is unsteady, soon enough the whole building will collapse. We need to start taking steps to alleviate tensions, and police taking accountability for their actions is the first step towards this. Thank you for allowing me to voice my opinion.

Sincerely, Marita Galliher

**Testimony 3:**

Good afternoon to the Police Transparency and Accountability Task Force, My name is Cassidy McHugh, I am 20 years old and am a senior here at the University of New Haven. I am currently working towards a degree in criminal justice with a concentration in juvenile justice and will be pursing a graduate degree next fall. With my education, I want to work in the juvenile justice system and help guide adolescents through what might be one of the most challenging parts of their lives. Taking accountability for our thoughts, words, and actions is something that we are all taught when we were younger and there is no exception for this when it comes to police officers. Police officers should at the very least be held to the same set of standards and ideals as the citizens they are serving, if not higher.

The entire purpose of the Police Accountability Bill is just this, creating the accountability that may not have been there before. The matter of fact is that police officers are marked with the responsibility of protecting and serving. They cannot fully carry out these duties if they themselves or any of their colleagues are being unjust, acting under bias, or acting with their interest in mind, not the citizens they are serving. I believe that the bill is just the beginning of setting the record straight on how officers should conduct themselves, but it is a step in the right direction. Personally, I was born and raised in Connecticut and the news of this bill filled my feed on practically everything when it was proposed and passed.

I saw many people against fighting against it and I kept asking myself “why?” While this bill may be just the bare beginnings, it fights for a more inclusive and honest police departments by having policies on things such as false reporting based on race, gender, or sexual identity, requiring implicit bias training among many other policies that will be put in place. There would not be regulations put in place for these things if they did not hold a significant amount of merit in police departments and to Connecticut citizens. I believe that the most prominent issue that the Police Accountability Bill brings to light is the fact that there are not enough minority police officers throughout Connecticut.

The bill’s proposition is to recruit, retain and promote more minority officers to accurately represent the community that the department is serving is one that may hold very promising results. Through this, I think that this part of the bill will be a very crucial piece in creating healthier, long lasting relationships between the community and its officers. When individuals see people that look like them in positions that have a significant amount of perceived authority, they feel fewer negative emotions and more at ease in the situation at hand. I would like to thank the members of the Task Force for coming to the University but also for hearing my testimony today. The one thing I would want you to take away from what I have said today is that accountability is just the first step in creating an equitable criminal justice system in the State of Connecticut. While this may seem like a daunting task, the Police Accountability Bill is the perfect kick off for this.

**Testimony 4:**

Good afternoon everyone. My name is Kadeem Mckoy. I am 21 years old and am currently in my senior year at the University of New Haven. The perspective I wish to provide is one of someone who, despite a constant fear of the police, has never truly had a negative experience with an officer. This is not to say, however, that I have not been witness to some of the many injustices that go unaccounted for in the criminal justice system on a regular basis. Even within my own community, in the town of Hartford, CT, I have seen a drastic change in policing that comes largely in part to the rising importance of police accountability.

One of my eldest cousins loves to tell the story of the time he made the mistake of coming to visit us from his house in Manchester a little too late one night in 2013. 19 at the time, he left our house after dinner and stopped at a gas station only three minutes away from our house. Upon leaving the car he noticed two officers holding another young, black kid against a wall by his collar. After noticing my cousin watching them, the officers approached my cousin swiftly and aggressively. “Where you from kid?”, “What you doing out so late?”, “Is this your car?” They asked him, still approaching rapidly. Due to the shock of the situation, my cousin wasn’t able to answer. Suddenly, he was pressed against his car in the same fashion they had just been holding the other boy, who had run away after the officers shifted their attention to my cousin.

As the officers grilled him, my cousin explained he was just visiting for dinner and that he was grabbing gas to go back home in Manchester. Like a trigger word, the officers let go and jokingly yelled “Manchester!? Boy if you don’t get your little butt back home, there’s killers out here!” I tell his story to highlight the importance of police accountability and transparency while also addressing the many layers that there are to policing. For starters, those officers had no right violating the privacy and freedom of my cousin or the other child involved in this story. They easily could have communicated to these young teens that it wasn’t safe and it would be better if they hurried to safety. Bully-like policing strategies such as this example are what contribute to the general mistrust of police by communities who fall victim to them.

Secondly, note the time of day that this event occurred. It was a dark night where any violations of civil liberties or freedoms could easily be swept under the rug. The other layer comes in that both of the victims of this tragic event were young, colored males. A large portion of racial disparities and mistrust between officers and communities of color come from the fact that white, adult males are the primary perpetrators assaulting these young, black kids. Not only is there the argument of race, but also that these are adults handling adolescents. It almost cements a lasting mistrust and miscommunication within a generation of people.

For these reasons, and an abundance of others, the Police Transparency and Accountability Bill maintains its importance in our community. Holding police accountable for their actions levels the playing field for those who are done wrong by the criminal justice system. Although my cousin’s story didn’t have a bad ending like many other young, black kids’ do, it still highlights the importance of having the proper measures in place to correct the behaviors that contribute to police mistrust and misconduct. Police accountability can be taught through training programs while officers are in the recruitment process. It can be done by ensuring that any use of force by an officer that is deemed unnecessary is addressed and accounted for. It can also be done by officers stepping up and calling out the “bad apples” that contaminate the whole tree when they see behavior that is intolerable. Thank you, everyone, for listening and thank you to the panel for allowing me to share my perspective and my cousin’s story. If anyone has any questions I am more than happy to answer them. I hope everyone has a great rest of your days.

**Testimony 5:**

Hello, I just wanted to say thank you to everyone who came out to discuss police transparency and accountability. My name is Hannah Odom, I am a senior at the University of New Haven and an intern for the Tow Youth Justice Institute. I am here to give my perspective, to the Police and Transparency Accountability Task Force, on police training when dealing with kids Lack of training: First, I would like to talk about the lack of police training there is for dealing with kids. Of the twenty-eight training hours, Connecticut police officers are mandated to complete only one of them is dedicated to “handling Juveniles.” Through my studies as well as my personal opinion, this is not enough. Dealing with a juvenile is much different than dealing with an adult. It is said that a child's brain is not fully developed until about twenty-five.

Juveniles are not, as one of my professors (Dr. Carbone) once said, “mini-adults” and should not be treated as such. The use of police SROs in schools: Another topic that needs to be addressed is the use of SROs or school resource officers in schools. Rather than do what they were originally meant to do, protect schools and the people in them from outside forces, SROs often do more harm than good and make students feel unsafe and threatened. SROs are sworn-in law enforcement officers; they carry all the same equipment as police do. In a place that is supposed to be nurturing and meant for learning; this can make students feel nervous and uneasy.

Also, SROs do not have the necessary training needed to properly deal with a misbehaving student. When a student misbehaves they use the same techniques and methods used on adults. With the increase in technology and cameras, we can see this first hand. There are countless videos, on YouTube, of SROs using overly aggressive techniques to deal with these misbehaving students including body slamming, choking, and yelling in student's faces. This can be very traumatizing for students, especially young kids.

Thank you Police Accountability Task Force and listeners for hearing my perspective on the need for police training when dealing with kids. To reiterate, there are not enough required training hours for police and dealing with kids. This is especially prominent in schools where SROs do not have the necessary training for handling a child. SROs will use overly aggressive techniques that should not be used in schools or on children. For someone who is meant to be keeping these students safe, students are afraid of them and make them nervous. Along with the police accountability bill, we must take more action to ensure that police are properly trained on how to deal with kids both in and outside of the classroom. We need to increase the number of hours of training required on handling juveniles. The police also need to have a better understanding of the social and emotional development of a juvenile to ensure they are treated properly.

**Testimony 6:**

Dear members of the Police Transparency and Accountability Task Force, My name is Emily Pelletier and I am 24 years old. I am an undergraduate student attending the University of New Haven. I am a senior who will be graduating in January 2021. I studied criminal justice at Tunxis Community College where I received my associates degree and am currently working towards my bachelors’ degree at the University of New Haven. I am studying criminal justice with a concentration in community corrections and rehabilitation. I have taken multiple classes that contributed to my knowledge of police relationships with the community including exploring delinquency, race class gender issues, and working with criminal justice system clients. I am testifying today to ask members of the Police Transparency and Accountability Task Force to submit recommendations to the Connecticut Legislature and to Governor Lamont that will improve policing policies and community relations.

To start, I would like to discuss training. Through my studies at the University of New Haven and from being present in communities, I have become aware of situations where police are called to assist where their responses show they are not qualified, or they are not displaying the proper policing techniques. We cannot expect every police officer to know how to handle different situations without training them on it. De-escalation techniques and diversity training are the first place to start. Holding police accountable for their actions is only justified if we can say that they were properly trained to deploy those actions. Police officers will be more transparent if they feel properly educated on the correct techniques to handle the wide variety of situations they face in their everyday career.

I support the CT Police Accountability Bill. My support for this bill comes from my knowledge of how perceptions of police by the community and relationships with police affect how well they do their job. The community will respond more positively to the presence of police if they know they can be held responsible for mistreatment. Removing the policy of qualified immunity for police officer’s will not only ensure that everyone is held to the same standard regardless of their position in society, but it will also give a reminder to police that they have to follow the rules and will be punished if they decide not to do so. Police Officers must be transparent about their actions and held accountable when they are unjustified. The state must guarantee that departments will offer ongoing training for officers to participate in, in order to decrease disparities in treatment of minorities and people of color.

I want to thank the members of the Police Transparency and Accountability Task Force for reading my written testimony today. Training police officers to handle different situations with diverse populations will help improve the relationship between the escalation techniques and diversity training are the first place to start. Holding police accountable for their actions is only justified if we can say that they were properly trained to deploy those actions. Police officers will be more transparent if they feel properly educated on the correct techniques to handle the wide variety of situations they face in their everyday career.

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Police Officers must be transparent about their actions and held accountable when they are unjustified. The state must guarantee that departments will offer ongoing training for officers to participate in, in order to decrease disparities in treatment of minorities and people of color. I want to thank the members of the Police Transparency and Accountability Task Force for reading my written testimony today. Training police officers to handle different situations with diverse populations will help improve the relationship between the officers and the community. Improving the relationship between the officers’ and community will help improve the transparency of the officer’s actions during community encounters. Holding Officer’s accountable for their actions while engaging with the community will ensure that everyone is held to the same standard and remove the discrepancies in police actions.

**Testimony 7:**

Hello everyone, My name is Arieliz Soto, and I am 20 years old. I am of Puerto Rican descent and I am from Wilmington, Delaware. I am a senior at the University of New Haven scheduled to graduate this Fall 2020. My major is Criminal Justice with a concentration in Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. I am also an executive board member for the UNH chapter of NAACP here on campus and LASA, and am a sister of Omega Phi Beta Sorority, Incorporated. As of right now, I am residing in New Haven, CT, a city that is known for its crimes and lack of resources.

I would like to see some change and improvements within the Criminal Justice field and do believe that CT accountability would be a great start. Holding police accountable for the actions and misconduct will be of great benefit to the system and the community itself. I have never had a bad experience with law enforcement but there are factors as to why, one being that I am white passing, however; I know that many of my friends and peers who are not have. Not only them but Black and Hispanic people as well. Racial and Ethnic disparities is a common thing within the system. Not enough accountability is being taken into and it is unacceptable. I believe that the task force should be implementing and creating training that will benefit them when out in the field. This consists of implicit and explicit bias training, better ways to communicate with the community, finding alternative ways to go about the situation without using unnecessary force.

The task force should also hire more Black and People of Color. Representation matters at the end of the day. We need people in higher up positions to reflect our communities. Police officers should try to get to know the communities they are assigned to and build relationships with the people in that community. This will be helpful when there are problems in that neighborhood/community. Training is also essential, this will help police officers know how to handle situations and allow them to leave their biases out of the situation by using their critical thinking skills. I support the CT Accountability Bill, because I believe there should be changed within the system. Changes that are internal can help reduce statistics. Underrepresented people should be respected and treated as equal, race, class and gender should never be a factor into how someone is treated. Accusations should be taken seriously and investigations should be conducted from an outside source to avoid any fraud.

I would like to Thank the Police Transparency and Accountability Task Force for listening to my testimony. Understand that not everyone has the same experiences with the police and criminal justice system as a whole, however; every experience should be respected. We cannot claim to make changes and still have the same recurring issues and claims. The Police Accountability Bills would be of great benefit as an initiative change within the system. Again, thank you.

**Testimony 8:**

Hello everyone and thank you Task Force for allowing me to speak. My name is Brianna Straiton, I am 21 years old, and I am currently a student at the University of New Haven. I am majoring in criminal justice with a concentration in juvenile justice and delinquency prevention. I am passionate about the criminal justice system and the youth that encounter police or end up within the juvenile justice system. I support the CT Police Accountability Bill because I think it is important to hold police accountable in situations that they should be held accountable for their actions. For example the new bill will make it mandatory for all officers to wear body cameras. Making body cameras a requirement is useful to the protection of the citizens and of the police.

I think it’s important to hold police accountable for their actions but also to ensure the safety of the community and the police officers. Something I remember from my childhood was two very different police interactions in two different schools. The police officer in my middle school was mean and most importantly he did not try to help children that were calling out for attention. He let the kids that get in trouble just get suspended and never talked to them one on one about why they might be acting out and how to get them to a better place. But on the other hand the police officer in my high school had impacted children and changed lives of the youth. I worked in an office located near his and I still remember the time I could hear him ask the kid why he did what he did. He even went further to ask him what he could do to help him become the person that he wants to be without that involving any sort of criminal activity.

I think it is important for police to interact with youth and to help youth veer away from criminal involvement. If police have positive encounters with the youth that could impact them and their decision making. A specific issue that I am passionate about with policing is the training requirements and the actual training that occurs for police interactions with juveniles. This is something that the Task Force should consider investigating and researching. I think the implementation of more training for police with the youth is crucial to the criminal and juvenile justice system. For example in CT police officers get less than 24 hours of training on youth. I think there should be more than 24 hours of training and rather weeks’ worth of classes taught on how police should interact with the youth and how to build a connection with the youth so that there is a sense of safety and security.

I am asking that the Task Force try to implement more training on youth for the police officers so that they are better equipped to deal with the youth. Some recommendations I have for the Task Force to further address police accountability would be finding ways to overcome implicit and explicit biases. When police officers have personal biases it interacts with the performance of their jobs. I would find it useful for the Task Force to recommend bias training and how to put aside certain biases while on and off the job. I think it’s important to not show biases even when off the job because those could still have an effect on your job performance. Overall my two recommendations to the Task Force would be to try and implement more training on police interactions with the youth and ways to get rid of biases that could be affecting

an officer’s job performance. Thank you for taking the time to listen to me and for giving me this opportunity to speak. If you have any questions please feel free to ask!