

Testimony
IN SUPPORT of:
Senate Bill No. 987 - An Act Concerning Reinvestment of Savings Achieved Through a
Reduction in Correctional Facility Population Into Reentry and Community-Based
Services and Programs

Dear Senator Winfield (Co-Chair), Representative Stafstrom (Co-Chair), Senator Kissel (Ranking Member), and Representative Fishbein and esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee:

Our names are [Callie Gale Heilmann](#) and Gemeem Davis and we are the Co-Directors of Bridgeport Generation Now and residents of Bridgeport. Founded in 2016, Bridgeport Generation Now is a grassroots, member-based organization with over 300 members, 90% of whom are Bridgeport residents. Our mission is to strengthen civic engagement in ourselves and our communities to build the power we need to dismantle systemic racism and corruption in Bridgeport - and build the just, equitable, and livable city we know is possible.

We are testifying today in support of SB 987 - An Act Concerning Reinvestment of Savings Achieved Through a Reduction in Correctional Population Into Reentry and Community-Based Services and Programs.

When George Floyd was murdered by a Minneapolis Police Officer in May of last year it sent a shock wave through our nation and our state. After protest and political pressure, this committee led the nation by passing the Police Accountability Act - a necessary first step - in fixing our current policing crisis.

But policing is not a crisis unto itself. It is part and parcel of the larger American legacy of racism that has persisted in this nation since its founding. It is part of a structural system designed to control and keep Black people locked out of opportunity and literally in bondage.

Black Lives Matter is a call for the liberation Black folks - for the removal of structural, institutional and economic violence that has thwarted our progress and the progress of the nation. Bridgeport Generation Now is committed to that liberation and we see SB 987 as one tool for making social and economic equity a reality.

In July of 2019, our Public Safety and Police Accountability committee held a space where community members gave testimony on their experience with violence and misconduct with the Bridgeport Police Department - and spoke their truth directly to our Police Chief and other members of BPD. At this forum, a Bridgeport resident who is both a probation officer and a mother spoke deeply about the fear she holds for the safety of her 18 year-old Black son who has autism. In her words, "he has an invisible disability and I am concerned about officers dealing with Black and brown children who have invisible disabilities... because they will become combative, non-compliant to a simple request, 'what are you doing?'"

We all know her fear is justified. The deaths of Daniel Prude, Patrick Warren Sr. and our own Mubarak Souleman, killed by a CT State Trooper, show us all that police responses to mental health and substance abuse crises can end in tragedy.

To transform our society to create a system of public safety that in fact, keeps us all safe, we must shift our perspective. We must look at public safety through a public health lens and focus funding on addressing the root causes of community violence - like mental health, substance abuse, underperforming schools, high cost housing, lack of healthcare, and more.

Whether it's STAR in Denver or CAHOOTS in Eugene, Oregon, cities and states across this country agree and are creating public health responses to community needs that do not involve the police. This is a good thing - but building a new system requires serious commitment and investment at the state level. That is why we support SB 987, which will reinvest money into healthcare services that meet the needs of this moment.

Bridgeport currently has no structural mechanism in place for people needing mental health services when the police are called. With the reinvestment proposed in SB 987, we can fully fund the Dept. of Mental Health and Addiction Service mobile crisis interventions service to be available 24/7 statewide, dispatching trained mental health professionals to all 9-1-1 mental health calls.

Through SB 987 and other broader "Recovery For All" proposals in this legislative session, you all can continue to lead the nation's response to last summer's justified anger and demonstrated collective power. You can create and fund policies that make us all - including the mother and her son in Bridgeport - feel safe and loved.

Thank you for your continued leadership and commitment,

Gemeem Davis
Callie Gale Heilmann
Bridgeport Generation Now, Co-Directors