



Dear Members of the Committee on Public Safety and Security:

My name is Theo Haaks and I am an undergraduate student at Yale University. I write in support of **SB-122: AN ACT ESTABLISHING A UNIT WITHIN THE DIVISION OF STATE POLICE TO INVESTIGATE HATE CRIMES AND CRIMINAL ACTS COMMITTED BY EXTREMIST GROUPS.**

Hate crimes are on the rise in Connecticut, as they are across the nation. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the divisions that already exist between racial, ethnic, religious, and gender groups. Some of these divisions have worsened to the extent that they prompt violent action by an individual or group of individuals towards neighbors of minority status. One of the most significant duties of a government, whether it be federal, state, or local, is to assure the protection of its governed citizens. S.B. 122, through “establish[ing] a unit within the State Police to investigate hate crimes and criminal acts committed by extremist groups,” will hold Connecticut accountable to this responsibility.

In a recent editorial piece, Sen. Martin M. Looney makes a convincing case for the bill in writing “It is evident that a task force to investigate these trends should be established...our state police have already created task forces to pursue crimes including narcotics sales, home invasions, motor vehicle fraud, urban violence, automotive theft, and illegal firearms...a task force to investigate hate crimes and violence based on ideology is a necessity to preserve the safety and peace of mind of the people of Connecticut.”

According to the Connecticut 2017 Bias Crime Report, in 66 of the 110 hate crime incidents reported, there is no information about the offender. How can we expect to prosecute a person we have no information about? This issue will be eliminated for the most part with the formation of a police unit dedicated to cracking down on hate crime incidents. Furthermore, there has been an increase in the activity among extremist groups in Connecticut. The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) reports that in 2015, there were only two groups motivated by bias and bigotry operating within the state of Connecticut. However, in 2020, the SPLC listed *six* different hate groups that were tracked by law enforcement in Connecticut. The need for legislative action has never been greater.

A government has the responsibility to protect the safety of their citizens — regardless of their racial, ethnic, or religious identities. While it would be wonderful to live in a country so open and accepting of its citizens that the government need not intervene, the sad truth is that in our post Trump era, extremist groups are on the rise and continue to endanger their targets. The establishment of an investigation team to ensure the safety of Connecticut citizens is a necessary response to our political moment.

I hope that the evidence presented in this testimony is sufficient enough to prove that **SB-122: AN ACT ESTABLISHING A UNIT WITHIN THE DIVISION OF STATE POLICE TO INVESTIGATE HATE CRIMES AND CRIMINAL ACTS COMMITTED BY EXTREMIST GROUPS** will be an extremely beneficial policy to pass for all citizens of Connecticut, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or sexual orientation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

With gratitude,

Theo Haaks