

Dear Members of the Committee on Public Safety and Security:

My name is Isabella Marin 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 residents. 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.

As an immigrant and a Latinx woman, I know that there are groups that hate me just for being who I am. Knowing that there is a division focusing on hate crimes and extremists would make me feel safer and more welcome in the state of Connecticut. According to the FBI, just in 2019, there were more than 50 hate crime incidents, caused by prejudice towards an individual's race, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and gender. I want to know that this democracy protects its minorities and don't want to fear that someone will hurt me because of who I am and where I come from.

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 residents of Connecticut, regardless of race, ethnicity, religion, gender, or sexual orientation.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

With gratitude,

Isabella Marin

