

**Mollie Greenwood**  
**Testimony Supporting SB 572:**  
**An Act Concerning Community Crisis Response Teams and Reentry Centers.**  
**Legislative Office Building**  
**[2/10/21]**

Representative Maria Horn, Senator Dennis Bradley, Senator Catherine Osten, Representative Alphonse Paolillo, and distinguished members of the Public Safety and Security Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Mollie Greenwood and I'm a resident of West Hartford, CT.

I support SB 572 because it will tackle issues that disproportionately affect communities of color. The Community Crisis Response Team will limit unneeded contact with law enforcement by dispatching appropriately qualified professionals to respond to 9-1-1 and non-emergency calls related to welfare checks, homelessness, substance use disorder and mental health crises. I worked in homeless services for five years, and during that time I observed significant ticketing and even incarceration as a response to vulnerable individuals experiencing homelessness, many of whom were also experiencing mental health crises that were compounded by the daily stress of not knowing where you will stay that night.

The Community Crisis Response Team program will create a support system to deal with individuals who should not be incarcerated but provided with the opportunity to get connected to treatment, services and programs during their moments of crisis. This social service approach to law enforcement will reduce the incarceration rate and divert people from unnecessary visits to the emergency room. Police have been tasked with responding to many social issues that they are inappropriately equipped for. As the nation and state call for social justice and reimagining policing, SB 572 seeks to enhance first responses and reduce repeat emergency calls, while getting constituents the help that police officers don't have the training, resources, or time to provide. While police officers are often the only option for businesses, residents, and even social services providers to contact for additional support, they are rarely trained sufficiently to respond in a way that is clinically advisable in mental health crises. I lived in the Spectra complex in Hartford a couple of years ago, where law enforcement was called in to support the eviction of a woman very evidently in the midst of a mental health crisis. That individual's story was well documented by the news, and the officers responded as well as they were trained to do. But police response is not an adequate substitute for clinically trained professionals who specialize in de-escalation of behavioral health crises. This example of an individual living in a boutique downtown apartment, and my many experiences with police involvement of cases of individuals experiencing homelessness highlight that the police department are the only service available to intervene in crisis situations, but that in the majority of crises triggered by mental health or substance use disorder, they are simply not the best qualified or most appropriate intervention. Connecticut can do better, and we must do better.

I also support SB 572 because it is the first step to ensuring that men and women returning home from incarceration have better chances to reintegrate into society. People returning home from incarceration are disproportionately affected by issues related to housing, employment, substance use disorder, mental illness, and chronic medical illness. The Reentry Welcome Centers will ensure that people are connected to these services on the day of their release, rather than dropped with no resources or assistance. The centers will also help people apply for public benefits and provide continuing supports while people are already in the community. Already in the City of Hartford the re-entry welcome center has provided a hub to better organize support for a population who deserves to re-enter society, and who deserves a fair shot.

Unfortunately, like the police department, re-entry counselors in the DOC are often over-worked, under-skilled, and again, are not professionals in the behavioral health or social services field. Taking advantage of the expertise of individuals whose goal is to connect people to a successful set of resources, rather than whose goal is to check off the box and move folks through incarceration, has a huge impact on the ability of offenders to thrive in the community after incarceration. This is a social justice issue, and a racial justice issue, and one where Connecticut has a documented track record of an intervention that does a better job supporting our residents!

From a fiscal perspective, SB 572 is a long-term investment to generate savings due to diversion from incarceration and the emergency room. From a human perspective, SB 572 provides the opportunity to fix systemic issues that disproportionately affect communities of color. We will likely never experience an America in which there is no police force, nor one totally free from jails and prisons, but we can certainly take a step towards a more human response to our fellow citizens, and take a step towards responses that will actually support people living a healthy, productive life in our communities, rather than continuing the cycle of recidivism.