



State of Connecticut

DIVISION OF PUBLIC DEFENDER SERVICES

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**Testimony of the Office of Chief Public Defender
Benedict R. Daigle, Assistant Public Defender**

JUDICIARY COMMITTEE - MARCH 6, 2024

Raised Bill No. 5324

AN ACT ESTABLISHING SECONDARY TRAFFIC VIOLATIONS

The Office of Chief Public Defender (OCPD) supports *Raised H.B. 5324 (LCO 1170) An Act Establishing Secondary Traffic Violations*, as the legislation is a step toward ensuring that people in Connecticut are not punished because of their poverty.

In much of Connecticut, personal vehicles are the most practical means by which individuals travel as required to maintain employment and meet other regular obligations. Thus, an individual's vehicle, while a privilege, is a necessity. As such, where the enforcement of a given traffic violation is not required to protect public safety or address any underlying conduct, such enforcement, and particularly the collateral consequences thereof, may present an unwarranted impediment to an individual's economic and family stability. This is especially true for individuals who are indigent and may lack the resources to timely address certain violations.

While not all the conduct and conditions proposed to be secondary violations are reflections of poverty, the Committee is right to err on the side of ensuring that poverty is not punished. In this regard, the Committee is acknowledging that certain violations are secondary not only to other violations, but also to the ability of individuals who may be indigent to go about their daily lives doing the best they can.

If the big picture goal is for people to be treated equitably and have a fair shot at socioeconomic stability, consequences that set people back regardless of financial ability undermine the legitimacy of our public institutions. Accountability which in operation punishes some people because of their poverty—because of their inability to buy their way out of it—is not just.

Page 2 of 2

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Measures of accountability and public safety ought to be strategically calibrated to allow and encourage people to move forward. That's a goal which benefits individuals, families, communities, and our state as a whole.

This office thanks the Committee and is willing to collaborate as appropriate to further promote equity in systems' treatment of individuals who are indigent. Thank you.