

To: Shannyn Morse, Judiciary Committee Assistant; Rep. Maxine Grad, Chair of the Judiciary Committee; and the members of the House Judiciary Committee
From: Anders Aughey, Central Vermont Showing Up For Racial Justice
Subject: H.492
Date: April 4th, 2017

I am writing concerning the testimony taking place on H.492 (Racial Justice Reform Bill) before the House Judiciary Committee this afternoon. I cannot make the hearing due to work, and I would like my comments to be submitted before the Committee.

It is very important to me that the Judiciary Committee vote to move H.492 forward, and continue to support it as it moves through the house. I have seen a groundswell of community support for this bill, evident by the numerous community meetings, a petition with over 1200 signatures , and a coalition of over thirty organizations back in it.

The creation of an Racial Justice Oversight Board would benefit all Vermonters. It would provide stronger safeguards against accidental or intentional injustices for everyone, and foster the forward-thinking sense of equality that Vermont prides itself in.

Racial Bias exists in this Vermont, and a January 2017 study co-authored by University of Vermont Professor Stephanie Seguíno contained some deeply troubling revelations. She concluded that “police use a lower threshold of evidence for searching Black and Hispanic drivers” and that these drivers were more likely to receive tickets. She concluded that there were clear trends, despite some incomplete data. I would like to emphasize that these facts allude to a system of implicit bias that is not the fault of any individual officer, but instead a symptom of inequalities in our country that goes back generations. A Racial Justice Oversight Board is one part of the solution to these wrongs.

I have heard that at past meetings on H.492, not all the necessary parties have been in the room. This is deeply troubling to me, because I see a clear need for and broad support for these reforms, which I want enacted this year. I fear that less than full participation by all bodies will hinder the progress of this bill, and I see an disruption of due process as stifling the democratic process in our state.

I would also like to bring to the attention of the committee the memorandum submitted by Thomas D. Anderson, Commissioner of Public Safety, on March 29th. I think that he raised several valid points. The bill ought to focus on all elements of the justice system, while continuing to support the progress made over the last several years around fair and impartial policing.

Thank you for taking the time to hear my comments, and to Ms. Morse for facilitating the process.

Anders Aughey
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