

MEMO

TO: Senate Judiciary Committee

FROM: John J. McCullough III, Project Director

SUBJECT: S. 219

DATE: June 17, 2020

Thank you for taking up this proposed legislation and giving it the importance it deserves. In recent weeks, following the murder of George Floyd, the country has begun to appreciate the crisis in law enforcement and the treatment that our nation's history of white supremacy has inflicted on our minority populations. I can only hope that this awareness will carry on so we can take the steps necessary to eradicate the racism, white supremacy, and police abuses that have stained the life of our country.

Vermont Legal Aid believes that S. 219 is an important step in reducing racially biased policing and the harmful, sometimes lethal, effects that it brings. We strongly support this legislation, particularly the prohibition on chokeholds, the requirement of body cameras for the State Police, and the addition of use of force in the race data reporting system.

We emphatically agree with the comment of the Human Rights Commission that it is vitally important to invest in alternative responses to mental illness, homelessness, community crises, and poverty. History has shown that law enforcement is not the solution to these problems and can often make them worse.

Finally, while the Committee is considering this legislation, we propose the following enhancements:

1. Expand the race data reporting program created by 20 V.S.A. § 2366 to include not only roadside stops but all police-civilian interactions, and to require the collection of race data for any victims as well as alleged perpetrators.
2. Create a civilian oversight board to review police uses of force.
3. Remove school resource officers from the school and transfer the resources to provision of mental health supports and services and the development of restorative justice practices.

Thank you for moving forward with this important legislation.