



January 25, 2022

Chairman Sears and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee,

My name is Alison Shih and I serve as Counsel for Everytown for Gun Safety where I'm responsible for supporting state legislative efforts in Vermont. Thank you for the opportunity to provide written testimony on S. 254. We are grateful for your consideration of this important legislation that would remove a barrier to police accountability and provide an avenue for those harmed by police violence to receive justice.

At Everytown for Gun Safety, we recognize that police violence is gun violence. Each year in the United States, police shoot and kill more than 1,000 people, and Black Americans are three times more likely to be shot and killed by police than white Americans.¹ We know that patterns of police violence have dramatically reduced public confidence in police and have led to community members seeing law enforcement as part of the problem. The fear sown by these shootings makes neighborhoods less safe since law enforcement cannot do its part in preventing violent crime without the assistance of the communities they serve.² Everytown supports strong policies that guide how police use force and how they are held accountable after force is misused in order to make our neighborhoods safer.

Since June 2020, four states, California, Colorado, Connecticut, and New Mexico, have passed legislation limiting the shield of qualified immunity in civil actions arising from police officer misconduct.³ Passing S. 254 would make Vermont the fifth state to remove this barrier to accountability and allow those harmed by police misconduct to receive compensation for their injuries. This bill would allow the individual people who are harmed by police violence receive the justice they deserve.

Importantly though, in creating an avenue for individual people to receive justice, this legislation would foster system accountability. It would do so in a way that is tailored to balancing the importance of ensuring accountability of individual officers who do not act in good faith with the importance of fully and fairly compensating people who are harmed.

We urge you to pass this important legislation that promotes accountability and access to justice.

Sincerely,

Alison Shih
Counsel, Everytown for Gun Safety

¹ Everytown for Gun Safety Fact Sheet, "Gun Violence and the Police," June 29, 2020, <https://www.everytown.org/issues/gun-violence-by-police/>.

² *Id.*

³ California, SB 2, Signed into law by Gov. Newsom September 30, 2021: https://leginfo.ca.gov/faces/billTextClient.xhtml?bill_id=202120220SB2; Colorado SB 217, Signed into law by Gov. Polis June 19, 2020, <https://legiscan.com/CO/bill/SB217/2020>; Connecticut HB 6004, Signed into law by Gov. Lamont July 31, 2020, https://www.cga.ct.gov/asp/cgabillstatus/cgabillstatus.asp?selBillType=Bill&which_year=2020&bill_num=6004; New Mexico HB 4 Grisham, Signed into law by Gov. April 7, 2021, https://www.nmlegis.gov/Sessions/21%20Regular/Amendments_In_Context/HB0004.pdf