



Legislative Testimony
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**Written Testimony Opposing House Bill 6572, An Act Concerning the
Creation of a State Police Sting Operations Unit to Address the Online
Sexual Abuse of Minors**

Senator Maher, Representative Linehan, Ranking Members Seminara and Dauphinais, and distinguished members of the Children Committee:

My name is Jess Zaccagnino, and I am the policy counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am writing to testify in opposition to HB 6572, An Act Concerning the Creation of a State Police Sting Operations Unit to Address the Online Sexual Abuse of Minors.

The sexual abuse of minors is abhorrent, and all children should have the chance to grow up safe and loved. Expanding policing to include an online sting unit in our state, however, would ultimately cause more harm than good, while failing to further protect children. The ACLU-CT recognizes that if we are to end the harm that policing has inflicted on communities of color across our state, we must begin by reallocating funds spent on policing into programs, services, and resources that actually make our communities healthier and safer – including those that protect the health, safety, and wellbeing of children. Connecticut must also work to limit the roles, responsibilities, and scale of policing to build an equitable future for all people in Connecticut. As such, the ACLU-CT strongly opposes HB 6572.

There is little evidence indicating that police online stings are effective in preventing crime. Sting operations are defined by the use of covert means by police to facilitate the crime in which the defendant is convicted, meaning that the victim of a sting

operation is arrested before any actual harm occurs.¹ Sting operations are problematic because of the high risk of luring people into committing offenses that they otherwise would not commit.² A 2017 study found that 87 percent of men convicted in stings targeting the online sexual abuse of minors had no records of prior, concurrent, or subsequent convictions.³ A survey of men convicted under a comparable sting operation in Washington found that 92 percent did not have a history of violent crime but that the men were sentenced to an average of six years in prison without parole.⁴ The men in this survey often ended up serving more time than men who were actually convicted of sexually assaulting children.⁵

Conviction of a sexual offense results in lifelong punishment. We have learned from the sex offender registries that already exist in Connecticut and many other states that they can constitute an additional extrajudicial form of punishment and that they can lead to retaliation against people who are trying to rehabilitate themselves. The ACLU-CT remains committed to policy solutions that protect marginalized communities from violence and will advocate for policies that truly do that. Providing more resources for the system of policing is not the answer to making children safer. We urge the legislature to commit itself to finding real solutions to these problems. As such, the ACLU-CT opposes House Bill 6572, and urges this Committee to do the same.

¹ Bruce Hay, *Sting Operations, Undercover Agents, and Entrapment*, 70 MO. L. REV. 387, at 388 (2005).

² *Id.*

³ Michael Winerip, *Convicted of Sex Crimes, But With No Victims*, N.Y. TIMES (Sept. 28, 2021), <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/08/26/magazine/sex-offender-operation-net-nanny.html>.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ *Id.*