



Town of

MANCHESTER

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT



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Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee: My name is Donald Janelle. I'm Deputy Emergency Manager with the Town of Manchester and co-chair of the Connecticut Municipal UAV Task Force. I am testifying in opposition to Section 4 of S.B. 3 which bans our Town's Emergency Responders from purchasing and using drones made in China. This bill will take life-saving tools away from our department and significantly hamper our ability to do our jobs and protect the public. Additionally, it will disrupt our ability to send timely, critical situational awareness information to the Emergency Operations Center during a disaster such as a tornado strike, hurricane, or blizzard.

Our department has operated a drone program since 2015. We use drones to provide overwatch for numerous fires, public events, where we, along with the Police Department provide the command post with live feeds so if an emergency were to occur, we could deploy our emergency assets much quicker.

Additionally, we provide weekly aerial images of large construction projects in Town. Furthermore, we flew over flood damaged areas in Town after major storms providing important damage information to the people in the EOC.

Using our FLIR camera (Forward Looking Infra-Red) and night vision cameras we can search for missing persons at night when low ambient light would otherwise make it difficult to find a lost or missing loved one.

Our drones also provide 360-degree live stream video to the Incident Command Post during emergency situations, which allows the incident commander to make the best decisions possible using real-time information. Additionally, a drone provides law enforcement with numerous capabilities such as accident scene mapping, officer safety at hostage situations and many more uses.

Drones with thermal capabilities can be a lifesaving tool for our first responders. For example, our fire service can use a drone at a roof fire to monitor the roof temperatures and let the fire fighters who are working on the roof know whether they are in a safe area or one that is about to collapse due to the heat of the fire below. Not only does this protect fire fighters' lives, but it also ensures they're available to rescue people in the building, put the fire out, and keep it from spreading.

We use DJI and Autel drones because they are the best tools for the job and the most cost-efficient. They would be banned under this bill. Chinese-made drones far exceed the capabilities and technical specifications of U.S. built drones. The U.S. drones that have *claimed* similar capabilities cost as much as twice that of the Chinese counterparts and don't perform as well. I have flown both and have first-hand knowledge and experience of this. The DJI (Chinese-made) drone we selected not only has a great camera payload ability, but also has two additional abilities that responders found useful. First, it can fly in high wind situations (up to 50 MPH). Second, it



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has a payload delivery capability. It can fly out to a lost person and drop, a radio, first aid equipment or even water until the ground responders could get to the lost person. This is why we opted to purchase a DJI drone. No U.S. made drone – at any price – has these combined capabilities. We have test flown US made drones and found them to be inferior to the Chinese made drones. In the world of public safety, reliability is of paramount importance.

In purchasing our drones, we have been as fiscally responsible as possible in spending taxpayer dollars. This bill will ground our drones without providing any money to replace our drones or any within the drone fleet across the State (including State agencies which currently have drones in service). The State of Florida enacted similar legislation which grounded over \$10 million worth of drones.

We understand this bill is intended to address cybersecurity concerns. Just like with any other device connected to the internet, we take appropriate steps to mitigate those threats. For example, our drones are flown and updated with external monitors that are not connected to any computers. Flight data collected is retained within the external monitor used for flying. It's useful to consider how much information is collected from devices you use every day. From your cell phones, computers, Alexa, Siri, Ring Doorbell cameras, Google searches not to mention the Chinese-made flat screen TV's in our living and bedrooms each equipped with a microphone and camera and connected full time to the internet. But we're not banning those.

If this bill passes, our drone program will cease to exist, simply because the cost of U.S. built drones will be prohibitive. Where we now operate multiple drones that can be deployed for many purposes, we would likely be limited to one that would serve only a fraction of the uses and take months to replace if damaged or lost. Not to mention the months of training on a different platform as they all handle differently. The supply chain greatly impacts the Town's ability to purchase a U.S. made drone, simply because they do not have the ability so supply the drones to U.S. towns who will place an order, almost simultaneously. With these severely restricted capabilities, the significant work it takes to run our program wouldn't be worth the effort.

I will leave you with this question. If a family member or loved one is missing in the woods, during the winter, along the Connecticut River, or along the shore, wouldn't you want the search teams to have every tool possible to help locate your loved one as quickly as possible?

One last thought. I will be very happy to demonstrate the capabilities of this life safety equipment, so you will be able to see for your self what a great asset the UAVs are to every emergency responder throughout the state.

Thank you for your time. I'm happy to answer any questions you might have.

Very truly yours,

Donald Janelle
Manchester Emergency Management