

Department of Police Services

Town of Southington, Connecticut

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Chief of Police

John F. Daly

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman, Members of the Committee: My name is John Marenholz. I'm a Detective and Coordinator of the Drone Program at the Southington Police Department. I am testifying in opposition to Section 4 of S.B. 3 which bans our department 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 and serve the public.

Our department has operated a drone program since June of 2022. We use our drone to accomplish a wide array of tasks and missions not only within the Town of Southington, but in neighboring towns and cities through mutual aid. Since the inception of our program, the Southington Police Department's Drone has been used to assist with the investigations of serious/fatal motor vehicle accidents, lost and/or missing hikers, as well as people in crisis situations where time was critical searching a vast area for a person in need. Our drone has been critical on high risk incidents when called upon for barricaded subjects and serving high risk arrest warrants. The capability of our Chinese made DJI drone made it possible to greatly improve officer safety and lowering the amount of time these Officers remained on scene.

The capability of the thermal camera on our drone has also been proven as an asset when assisting the Southington Fire Department. Being able to provide the Incident Commander of the scene with real-time thermal imaging of the structure has proven to be beneficial. This allows the redirecting of attention to different areas of the fire; and adjacent structures as well. The thermal camera also assists with accountability of firemen at the scene as well.

Our department uses a Chinese-made drone because of the time proven reliability and capability of the product. The Southington Police Department currently uses the DJI Matrice M30T, which is DJI's flagship product made for Public Safety. This particular model is capable of flying in inclement weather (rain, snow, wind, etc.), which is all too often the weather conditions when needed! This model has the ability to provide a multitude of camera views during flight; providing 16x Optical and 200x Digital Zoom, Thermal Camera, Wide Camera, and Laser Rangefinder all in one package. This allows for the optimal search and rescue drone as it can search of heat sources, and then zoom to confirm and locate the missing person.

This drone also has added payload capabilities, which we just invested in for a 7000 Lumen spotlight to assist with these search missions.

We have invested a substantial amount of money and training hours into our program. We did this to provide the citizens of the Town of Southington with the best product that could accomplish all that we set to do with our program. This investment has been proven worthy not only by the added safety that it brings our Officers, but it significantly lowered the amount of time that 1st Responders remained on scene during critical incidents; therefore lowered overtime costs to the municipalities. This bill would ground our drone and hamper the level of service that the Southington Police Department provides our citizens. I am greatly concerned about the ability to replace our current drone due to the department's allotted budget. It was a leap of faith for the administrators to initially invest in a relatively new program for the department; one that came with a significant initial monetary investment.

Thank you for your time.