

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the committee: My name is Pete Swanson. I am a retired fire lieutenant and currently act as a consultant, in the position of UAS Coordinator for the East Hartford Fire Department. I am here today to speak in opposition to Section 4 of Senate Bill 3 which would prohibit our department from purchasing and using drones made in China. This bill, if it passes as proposed, would greatly reduce our ability to provide mission-critical overwatch, and inhibit our ability to provide search and rescue operations in a swift manner.

Our department's drone program was started two years ago, and we are beginning to grow the program, adding licensed drone pilots as we get them trained. Our drone provides critical information for the incident commander at structure fires, major crashes, rescues, hazardous material incidents, etc. Thermal imaging allows us to see hidden fire in attics and walls, see our own personnel when operating in a precarious environment, even at night and in the thickest smoke. It allows us to see actual surface temperatures to determine fire spread. Our drone can provide scene lighting from above if needed, and even give us the ability to drop a PFD (life vest) to a struggling victim in the water.

We fly a Chinese-made drone from Autel. It is durable, compact, can fly in gusty winds, has a large, bright smart controller, a high-resolution thermal imaging camera, high res optical and video cameras. Included batteries allow two hours of flight time, as well as a spotlight and loudspeaker that allows to us to communicate with victims or make announcements during a natural disaster. The drone has obstacle avoidance and can carry a one-pound plus payload (portable radio, cell phone, life vest)

At the time of purchase, the drone and its accessories cost about \$8,000. We have invested even more money in peripherals, pilot certification and training specific to this drone

At the time of purchase, there was neither apples-to-apples nor dollar-to-dollar competition from any "blue drone" or American-made UAV. There were a few options, but the cost for most of them was anywhere from 3 to 5 times the amount we paid. Most of these manufacturers did not have the track record of Autel, and availability was not immediate...there was a waiting list for those who could afford to trial an unproven product at a premium cost. Many of the American made options were limited in technology, whether inferior imaging systems, no obstacle avoidance, shorter flight times, less wind resistance, limited or no ability to carry and/or drop a payload, etc.

We were able to take delivery of our drone immediately, with no waiting list. When our damaged drone needed replacement, the turnaround time was three days.

We understand cybersecurity concerns, and take them seriously. We operate under a strict data policy. Data is written to a Micro SD card which is removed from the drone after every flight. The data is saved in a secure folder and the card is formatted blank and reinstalled. Data retention follows schedule set by Connecticut Schedule M7.

\*\*\*\*(Public Safety and Emergency Services Records) of the Connecticut State Library, Office of the Public Records Administrator.

Our drone is a Chinese drone. It is a life safety tool, not a spy. It only flies where we fly it and when we fly it. Its primary purpose is life safety. It does not constitute a threat to national or state security.

Fire departments and police department need drones. They are a necessary, life-saving tool.

Taking away the tools we already have, know, trust and depend upon, only to force us to start over, does not serve public safety. Please do not undo the hard work that has been done.

Thank you for your time.

Peter Swanson  
UAS Coordinator  
East Hartford Fire Department