

Town of Fairfield News

7/30/2020 - When civil discourse is lost in the debate, Op-Ed by Brenda Kupchick

An [Op-Ed](#) by First Selectwoman Kupchick

When civil discourse is lost in the debate

Since the murder of George Floyd, Fairfield has been host to protests and rallies. At each of these events, protesters were provided the opportunity to safely exercise their First Amendment right. There were no counter-protests or interruptions; just an engaged citizenry that attended peacefully, listened, and went home, myself among them. The Fairfield Police Department provided a safe environment for protesters by taking swift action to close down the Post Road as they spilled onto the street. While faced with signs that read “Police are Murderers” and other profane language, they continued to provide safe passage with the utmost professionalism.

On Monday afternoon, I held a press conference on the front steps of the Fairfield Police Department with law enforcement and other local elected officials to express concerns regarding HB 6004: An Act Concerning Police Accountability, which passed the Connecticut House of Representatives last week.

Instead of being afforded the same courtesy to exercise our First Amendment right, we were shouted down, called a shocking array of profanities and further insulted with vulgarities displayed on posters, along with a large banner with the words “Defund and Disarm the Police”.

Let me be very clear about one thing. As the chief elected official of the town of Fairfield, I will never support defunding or disarming the Fairfield Police Department.

I unequivocally support the sections of the bill that include further training, education, mental health screenings and accountability of law enforcement. I’m extremely proud that the Fairfield Police Department already has policies in place that meets or exceeds many of those provisions outlined in the bill.

However, there is language in the bill, specifically the section ending qualified immunity, that our police chief and I believe will significantly impact the ability of our police officers to do their jobs and it will hinder Fairfield’s ability to retain good cops and recruit new ones.

Additionally, there will potentially be a huge financial impact on town budgets, the extent of which is still

unknown because the bill has not been fully vetted.

Undoubtedly there are policies we can put in place to hold bad actors in police departments accountable, but we should do so without punishing the majority of the good men and women who protect our community every single day.

For a bill of this magnitude with such broad implications to be rushed through a three-week process, only have one public hearing, and then be voted on in the middle of the night, is concerning and irresponsible. I hoped the Senate would table the bill until the legislature reconvened in September so all voices could be considered.

I call on the governor, who I know to be thoughtful, to hit the pause button and ensure this important legislation is reviewed completely before it is passed into law.

Emotions are high and the national political landscape makes it more difficult for all of us on a local level, but I was extremely disheartened by the behavior of the protesters who disrupted the press conference on Monday. Everyone is afforded the same protections under the First Amendment, but the only way we can truly find solutions is to participate in civil discourse, whereby conversation occurs with the intention of enhancing one's own understanding.

I call on our residents to engage in respectful and productive conversations. I appreciate and value the input from members of our community who have called me over these last few months in effort to help provide a greater understanding to me of life experiences that are different than my own.

I want to close by thanking the men and women who serve our community honorably; for their professionalism and integrity, and for putting their personal safety on the line every day to keep the residents of Fairfield safe. I thank you and many of our residents thank you.

Fairfield will get through these challenging times together.

Republican Brenda Kupchick is the first selectwoman for the town of Fairfield.

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