



**Testimony in support of
H.2519/S.1552 An Act to Create Alternatives for Community Education Services (ACES)
Submitted to the Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security
By Jennifer Muroff, LWVMA Racial Justice Specialist
July 14, 2021**

We commend the legislature for passing police reform last session and applaud its efforts to draft Peace Officer Standards and Training (POST) system guidelines going into effect this month. But we can do more to prevent police shootings of unarmed civilians.

Black Americans, mostly young and male, are killed by police twice as often as white Americans. According to *The Washington Post* database Fatal Force, more than 5,000 fatal police shootings have occurred in the US since 2015, with 985 shot within the last year. We are not immune to the issue here at home. [The Boston Globe reported in November 2020](#) that two Massachusetts residents were fatally shot and two injured by police within a span of ten days, and that those shot had been treated for mental illness.

This bill aims to solve the problem of police shooting unarmed civilians experiencing a mental health crisis. Currently, there is no alternative in Massachusetts to calling 911 when folks need any type of help. This bill would establish grant programs via the Executive Office of Health and Human Services for over-policed cities to create and administer their own community-based and community-led alternatives. Such alternatives would prevent people from being arrested, jailed or shot when they call for help. Additionally, these programs would lift a burden off police who are not trained in mental health crisis intervention, freeing the police to focus on other public safety issues.

Many cities already offer successful non-police response programs, including the original civilian response program in Eugene, Oregon, called CAHOOTS. [Pilot programs](#) have been launched in Austin, Chicago, San Francisco, Albuquerque, Portland and Rochester. Officials in Los Angeles, Baltimore, Oakland, Dayton, and Charlotte are exploring similar models. Federal funding already exists for states establishing CAHOOTS-like programs via the American Rescue Plan. States can receive an [85% match in Medicaid funds](#) from the federal government; \$1.9 trillion is included in the American Rescue Plan for this specific purpose. The LWVMA, representing 47 local Leagues from Cape Cod to the Berkshires, supports violence prevention programs in all communities and action to support public and private development and coordination of programs that emphasize the primary prevention of violence. The League also supports the active role of government and social institutions in preventing violent behavior and the allocation of public monies in government programs to prevent violence.

The League of Women Voters advocates for preventing excessive force and brutality by law enforcement. We also call for prompt actions by our membership to help our elected officials and all Americans to recognize that Black, Indigenous and all people of color (BIPOC) deserve



equal protection under the law.

Following the murder of George Floyd, the LWVUS joined with more than 400 civil rights organizations calling on Congress to implement needed policing reforms. But Congress has yet to pass the federal version of this ACES bill. The letter urged congressional leadership to swiftly rectify the legacy of white supremacy and anti-Black racism that has led to police violence against Black people across our country. The letter requested a ban on the use of force as a punitive measure or means of retaliation against individuals who pose a danger only to themselves, such as a person in mental health crisis.

LWVMA believes every resident should have access to a basic level of care including mental health care. The League believes that health care services could be more equitably distributed by allocating medical resources to underserved areas.

For all these reasons, the LWVMA supports this bill and asks that you favorably report this bill out of committee. Thank you for your consideration.