



A Better Way Foundation is a Connecticut non-profit organization that is dedicated to a sensible shift in drug policy from one of incarceration to substance abuse treatment and public health.

Testimony before the Judiciary Committee
Raised HB 5780 An Act Concerning Safe Schools

Hello Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor, and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Lorenzo Jones and I am the Executive Director of A Better Way Foundation.

A Better Way Foundation is committed to providing public education for community, civil rights, public, labor and religious leaders in order to effectively refocus the direction of Connecticut's drug policies. We collaborate with organizations that are focused on building social capital by keeping fathers, mothers and bread-winners in communities as opposed to taking them out of their homes and communities to place them in prisons for petty drug offenses.

Today I am testifying before you not only as the Executive Director of A Better Way Foundation but more importantly as a parent and resident of Hartford. My family, friends and I have dealt with the ramifications of school zone laws for years. As a community organizer, I worked with neighborhood block clubs that used school zone laws as a tool to "clean up" neighborhoods and develop public safety strategies. After 10 years of school zones, these communities are still seen as the most challenged in the State. As a parent and neighbor, I have had to deal with the quote - un quote "unintended consequences" of school zones, which is the demise and removal of black men in my community. I am here today because I think we can create sensible and rational approaches to public safety that keeps our young men and women connected to their families and appropriately responds to addiction and drugs.

According to a report published by the Department of Public Health in 2005 88% of the drug overdose deaths in 2004 were White people. According to the Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparities in the Criminal Justice System CT has one of the nation's highest rate of racial disparities between People of Color and White people within the Department of Corrections. As whites are dieing for the lack of treatment and attention, blacks are being jailed and removed from our communities as part of a quick fix that is not fixing anything. In addition to these facts, findings from local and national researchers suggest that mandatory minimum laws like CT's school zone law have not accomplished the intended goal of deterring crime and protecting children and have not be successful at engaging my family, community and this legislature in finding a reasonable and rational alternative.

- What these laws have created are several undesirable results that we all have to take very serious and come to grips with. Research have shown that :
School Zones have not accomplished the intended goal of protecting children
School Zone laws have contributed to the over incarceration urban residents and
School Zones have done nothing to address drug overdoses within rural and suburban communities