

Good evening members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Barbara Fair and I want to thank you for this opportunity to give testimony in relation to the HB5780, an act concerning safe schools. As a member of People Against Injustice and as a parent and grandparent I am in support of this legislation because it is part of the many steps that we must take in continuing to reverse the tide of racism in Connecticut and the injustice that it fosters. The policy of enhanced sentencing for anyone charged with possession or sales of narcotics within a designated school zone which is an area within 1500 ft of a school, day care or housing project is a clearly discriminatory policy designed to solidify the oppression of Black, Latino and poor Whites who reside within certain urban areas. I recognize that many people believe that this policy as well as the crack vs cocaine policy had unintended consequences. I say to you that these policies were designed behind closed doors with intent to do exactly what they have done for the past 3 decades following the Civil Rights era when African people gained some rights which Whites did not want to respect. The president Lyndon Baines Johnson said it best when he stated that the Emancipation Proclamation was just that; a proclamation and not a fact of freedom. It did nothing more than move the African people from the darkness of legalized enslavement into the sunlight of physical freedom and then laws were put in place to control their lives and that legacy continues into 2006. With every wrong that we try to right there are people sitting in a room devising ways to keep everything in place. Policies such as the 1500 ft ruling is one of those policies designed with an intended purpose. It is one of those many policies that are a means to an end and that end is to control the lives of the marginalized in our communities within the criminal justice and prison industry; those people being predominately Black, Latino and poor whites who cannot defend themselves from such an evil system. The entire drug war is about power and control. It's disguised as our government trying to protect us from ourselves while it perpetuates racial strife and destruction of families and communities. It is a failed war that has been going on for over 3 decades with no exit strategy in mind. It is said to be about ending drug use while the reality is that more people use drugs than ever before, use begins at an earlier age, the drugs are cheaper and purer and they are more readily available. One might ask then why are continuing to do the same thing over and over again implementing policies with unintended consequences. I say to you that there are no unintended consequences. The intent is the mass incarceration of Black, Latino and poor whites around this country and in that respect the war has been extremely successful and profitable as well. Look at the many jobs created since the drug war began. There is no exit strategy because there would be a multitude of job losses and then what would we do with the surplus people whom we have kept in a cage for so many years and let out with no skills or opportunities for success and many with a new problem; mental illness. This bill was originally introduced as one that was about protecting our kids and being tough on crime and the boggy man was the drug dealer who was waiting at the school grounds waiting to pounce on our children with drugs. The fact is nearly 90% of drug arrests occur between the hours of 4pm and 2 am when school is not in session. Another fact in urban areas such as New Haven the 1500 ft ruling will always apply and what's more important is that it becomes an insurance policy that prosecutors utilize in getting convictions even from those who are not guilty.

Recommendations for reform were made in 1998, 2000, 2001 and here we are in 2006 continuing that struggle to end the blatant injustice of this policy.

It is imperative that this committee vote YES on HB 5780 and in doing so you will be sending a message to those who want to keep you from doing what's right by saying that to do is to be soft on crime. The reality of what you will be doing is to send a message to those who are the targets of these racially charged policies that we are no longer doing business as usual, that we are no longer falling for the scary stories and the cutesy sound bites to get laws passed and that we are reversing the tide of racism and injustice in Connecticut and finally that we are in the process of closing the racial divide in this state and that Connecticut will lose its place as #1 in racial disparity within the criminal justice and prison system.

In closing I want to take the time to applaud Rep Kirkley Bey and others for taking the high road and for fighting for what is right and just. I recognize it is never an easy battle and that's what I call courage.