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March 16, 2006

Judiciary Committee
State of CT
RE: Public Hearing on HB 5780

To Whom It May Concern:

For many years the state has approached the "WAR ON DRUGS" through strict legislation and mandatory sentencing. The result has been an out of control increase in incarcerations for non violent drug offenders and little to no impact on the actual use of drugs in our communities. In summary, The War on Drugs has failed. And the question is what are we going to do about it now?

We can begin to correct the problem buy revamping the current law that forces a mandatory sentence for possession within a school zone. In theory, this law has good intentions, but in reality it does nothing to address the real concern; dealers selling to our children.

Facts show a high percentage of arrests within school zones happen long after school has been dismissed. In addition, most cities have several schools within its borders. Virtually the entire city is school zones making every petty possession charge a mandatory sentence.

The people being locked up are not hardened criminals; they are men and women who at most just need direction and opportunity to recover from an all too common, but grossly ignored illness called addiction. I consider myself an expert on this matter because I once was one of those people arrested for such a crime and instead of incarceration **I was given the opportunity to receive "LONG TERM" care at a home for addicts. The result; for 9 years I have been clean and sober, and a contributing member of society.** I also committed myself to helping others break the cycle of addiction working for 7 years in a residential care facility and ministering to people struggling with addiction on my own now for 2 years.

I recently wrote the Attorney General on this very matter. My suggestion was and still is the state find facilities for the drug offenders that are in need of help instead of locking them up in our already overloaded and very expensive prisons. The treatment facility I attended and similar ones located all of the state and region, costs as little as \$1,000 per month. A far cry from the \$30,000 per year it costs to keep a person in prison.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the committee, please consider a Better Way to approach drug addiction. Please realize the War on Drugs has failed in its current format. Be bold, be innovative, be willing to really help our great state address the real problem; addiction, not crime!

Thank you for considering my ideas. May the Lord bless and keep you all.

Sincerely:

Rev. John P. Harris
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