



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 Bill #7406, LCO #6183
An Act Concerning Youthful Offenders, Delinquent Children and Drug-Free Zone
April 4, 2007**

Good morning members of the Judiciary Committee, statesmen, ladies and gentlemen. My name is LaResse Harvey from A Better Way Foundation. I am here to testify in support of Raised Bill No. 7406, An Act Concerning Youthful Offenders, Delinquent Children and Drug-Free Zones.

Today we are trying to save our youth's present and future lives. There are so many obstacles that young people face in this day and age, that we do not understand, yet we are so readily to toss them in a prison the moment they do not fit our criteria of a responsible youth. Our juvenile laws entrap our urban youth in a future where hand cuffs, barbwire, shakedown, strip searches and continued dehumanization is the order of the day. If we plan to have a future, we need to build more schools and fewer prisons. We need to correctly assist those who are surrounded by despair, because of their environment. Children have no control over where their parents can afford to live and they should not have to be punished for that.

The School Zone law is currently designed to imprison minorities young and old. The current zone of 1500 feet covers most of all major cities where low income Blacks, Latinos and Whites live. If you are an addict instead of treatment you get prison. If you are a youth instead of help or treatment, you get prison. Prison is not the answer for all cases. Are we preparing these children for college or a life of crime?

If we continue to ignore lower income families, youth and the laws that entrap them, then we are setting ourselves up for a future without hope. Once you have a felony it is almost impossible to survive. You are the last to get hired and/or to get an apartment. These are essential for functioning successfully in society.

We all have made the wrong choice as children and adults. Some of us have never been caught, while others suffer extreme consequences that effect the rest of their lives. It is for the later that I am here today. We need to adjust our laws in order to save our future. We need to think beyond right now to save our children. By reducing the 1500 feet and adjusting the law, we can have promising future. Please support Bill 7405 and give our children a future of possibilities and not chains.

A Better Way Foundation has included a School Zone packet with maps and reports.

Thank you,

LaResse Harvey



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Connecticut's drug-free zone laws disproportionately incarcerate urban residents for simple drug possession and ignore White residents who are dying from drug-induced overdose deaths.

We can change this!

History of the law:

- In 1987 the first drug-free school zone law was passed, creating a 2yr mandatory minimum enhancement for anyone convicted of selling drugs within 1,000 feet of school property.
- In 1989, legislators boosted the enhancement to three years.
- In 1992, they increased the scope of the zones to 1,500 feet and increased the number of zones by adding public housing projects along with schools.
- In 1994, they expanded the scope of the laws again by adding licensed day care centers.

The State of CT reviewed 300 hundred cases of people arrested for mandatory minimum drug sale offenses. Out of 300 cases 95% of the cases fell under this law. The researchers found that:

- "Mandatory minimum sentencing laws achieve few of their stated objectives and do not work."
- Except for 3 cases where students were arrested on school grounds, **none** of the people arrested were linked to the school or school activities by the police.
- Just 12% of arrests occurred during the school hours of 7:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.
- Most drug crime arrests (78 percent) occurred between 4:00 pm and 12:00 am.

School Zone laws have not accomplished their intended goals. Or have they?

- School zones cover entire urban areas, but barely cover schools in rural/suburban towns.
- In 2000, 1 in 11 Black men between the ages of 18 and 64 was in prison/jail.
- Nearly 50% of CT's total male prison population came from: Hartford, New Haven, and Bridgeport.
- In 2004, White people represented 88% of CT's drug-induced overdose deaths.
- Almost all drug crime arrests made in suburban/rural towns take place outside prohibited zones.

Questions our community needs to consider:

- Has this law actually reduced drug dealing and violence? NO.
- Is this law a tool for public safety or for prosecutors' conviction rates and careers? Yes.
- By reforming this law, can it be a better tool to reduce truancy? Yes.

Proposed reforms and revisions:

- Reduce the zones from 1,500 ft to 200 ft
- Require posting of signs to mark zones.
- Replace the 3yr mandatory minimum with a 5yr maximum penalty thereby creating Judicial Discretion
- Use more in-school suspension instead of mandatory out-of-school suspension

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Please support HB 7406: AN ACT CONCERNING YOUTHFUL OFFENDERS, DELINQUENT CHILDREN AND DRUG-FREE ZONES.

Who is A Better Way Foundation? (ABWF)

ABWF was founded in 1999 to promote public education and support all community leaders efforts to create effective alternatives to Connecticut's "war on drugs" policies.

The questions:

- **Have 20 years of drug free school zones made our cities safer?**
- **What have they actually accomplished?**

Here's why:

- White people accounted for 88% of all drug induced deaths in 2004. Dept Public Health report 2004.
- The law is only enforceable in urban communities.
- Black and Hispanic people make up less than 20% of the population. Yet they represent more than double White people in the prison. US Census Bureau 2000
- In 2000, almost 50 % of CT's male prison population came from Hartford, New Haven, and Bridgeport.

What does all this mean?

- **White addicts die in their addiction!**
- **Black and Hispanic residents go to prison not treatment!**
- **We can improve public safety without increasing felony convictions!**
- **Through treatment, public education, and jail diversion we can.**

Want to see the difference between school zones in cities and towns?
(Turn this flyer over)

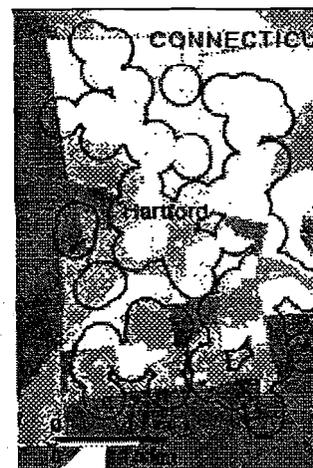
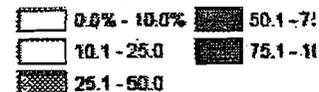
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Drug-zone debate

Some states, including Connecticut, are rethinking drug free zone laws. A map of Hartford Conn., shows such zones are often concentrated in minority neighborhoods.

— Drug-free zones (school, public housing, day care)

Percentage of white residents



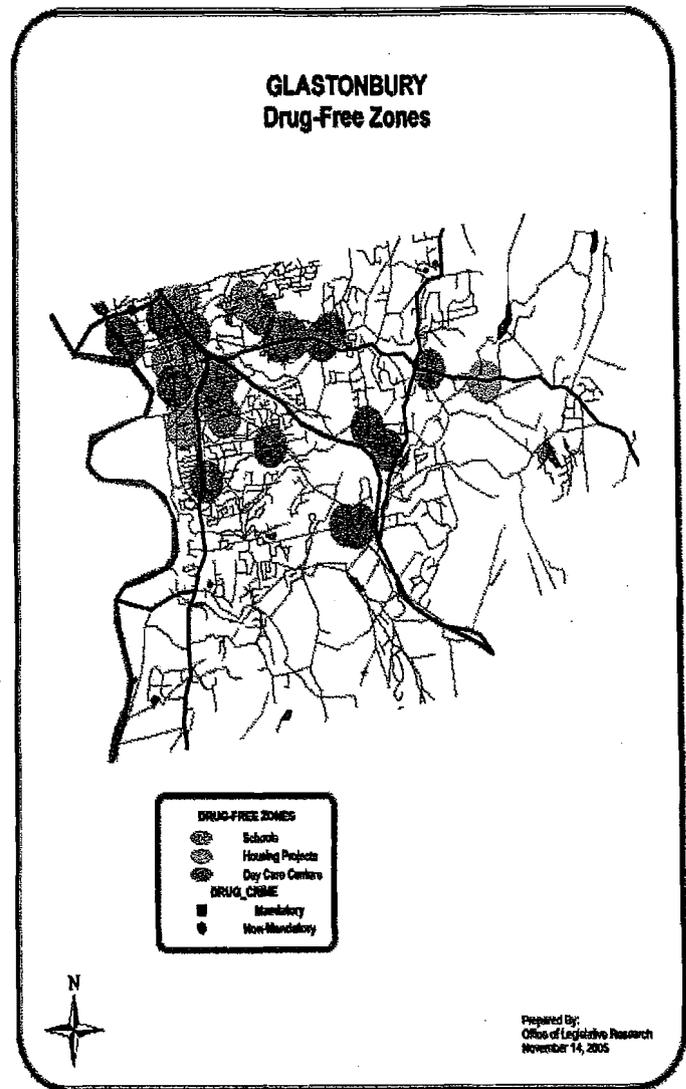
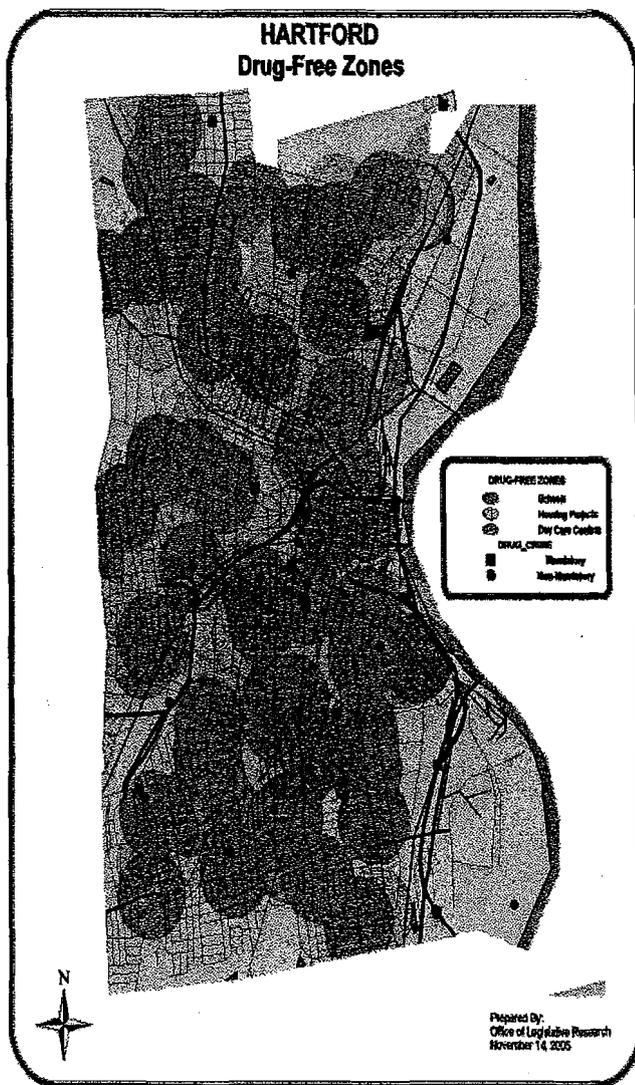
SOURCES: Census Bureau; Connecticut General Assembly



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Connecticut's drug-free zone laws disproportionately incarcerate urban residents for simple drug possession and ignore White residents who are dying from drug-induced overdose deaths. Here's why!



- 1 in 11 African American men in the state between the ages of 18 and 64 was in prison or in jail in 2000.
- In 2000, the incarceration rate for African American men was 18 times higher than the incarceration rate for non-Hispanic white men.

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