



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.

David Schultz - Clean Slate Committee Member Testimony  
Judiciary Committee

Raised SB 641: An Act Concerning Repeat Violent Offenders (oppose)

Raised HB 5876 An Act Concerning Mandatory Life Sentences for Repeat Violent Offenders (oppose)

Raised HB 5915 An Act Concerning Persistent Dangerous Felony Offenders (oppose)

HB 5035 An Act Concerning Repeat Violent Offenders, Burglary and Pardons and Parole (oppose)

My name is David Schultz. I am a member of the Clean Slate Committee. I reside in Hartford. I am urging the state legislature to oppose the “3 strikes” type of legislation that has been proposed.

About 10 years back, while driving home from my nightshift job, a young man jumped into my car as I was stopped at a red light. I was about 10 blocks south of the capital on Broad Street. He told me to give him \$20. Clearly he was a drug addict and needed to get his fix. I refused. I was furious that he had the audacity to invade my car.

He repeated his demand for \$20.00, and I threatened to drive to the police station. He started pulling documents out of my glove compartment and rolling down the window as if he was going to throw the documents out on the street. I grabbed five dollars out of my pocket, and said, “Take it or leave it.” He took it.

I saw this man around the streets often in the future and boiled with anger. But as time went on, I started feeling sorry for him. I began to understand that he was homeless and had some kind of physical illness. He was in desperate need of help. And unfortunately this country has an extremely mean spirit towards people of color and poor folks. I’m pretty certain he didn’t get the help he needed. He looked worse and worse through the years.

I wonder now, had I turned him in for this car-invasion – and this was his third strike —, would he have to spend the rest of his life in jail, under the newly proposed 3-strikes laws?

Though his invading my car was disturbing, and even more disturbing were the four robberies (in 7 years) that I have been victim to, I ask myself if I can see “public safety” the same way most white legislators in which Hartford is simply their place of employment. And my answer is most emphatically “no”

For me, my biggest concern regarding public safety is that my five-year old goes to school in a city (Hartford) where 1 in 6 kids has a parent in jail. Statistically speaking, there are three-four kids in his class with parents that are currently incarcerated. What does that mean? As a teacher, I can tell you that it will have an unbelievably compounding impact on the education of my son, and of all of the students in the class. It means that the place where he spends the largest part of his day he will be working at developing relationships with kids who are dealing with some of the most intense trauma (a parent in jail). It will mean that the teacher will have to take on a mountain of issues before she can even get to education. Clearly this all happens in the context of the incredibly racist state of Connecticut

Can it be true? One in nine black men between 20-34 years is in jail.

What has been the response of white legislators to this problem of mass incarceration of people of color that is eating away at the fabric of our society: “tougher laws, and increased sentences.”

Without knowing you, I can say with confidence that most white legislators don't know anyone in jail. Most white legislators do not spend time visiting their family members in jails or helping them when they get out of jail.

And even though most baby-boomer white legislators would quietly chuckle about their own "drug experimenting" past, few, if any, were incarcerated for it. Neither were their family members. Jail for drug use has been almost exclusively set-aside for folks of color. Only 1 in 10 people behind bars for illegal drug use are white.

It appears that most white legislators feel very comfortable with the New Jim Crow that they are overseeing in Connecticut. In Connecticut Black men are 12 times more likely to be incarcerated than White men.

How will history look at the Connecticut state legislature and its New Jim Crow policy of mass incarceration that it has helped to maintain? Probably the same way it looks at the old Jim Crow. Connecticut is the Montgomery Alabama of the 1950's. It is Lowndes County, Mississippi of the 1960's. And the whites that sat by idly during those years have been reincarnated into the Connecticut legislature.

The mass incarceration of Blacks and Latinos is no joke. It is wreaking havoc in our communities. We need treatment for drug addiction, not incarceration. We need training and education for those currently incarcerated. We need jobs, apartments and support for those re-integrating into the community.

More and more people are becoming aware of this. And we see Connecticut's white legislature for what it is – the keeper of the New Jim Crow. I urge you to take a stand against increased sentencing and to begin the important work of changing this system of mass incarceration of people of color.

Sincerely,

David Schultz