



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 Samuels 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 Samuels. I am Co-Chair of A Better Way Foundation's Clean Slate Committee, an advocacy group for currently and formerly incarcerated individuals. I am opposing raised SB 641: An Act Concerning Repeat Violent Offenders, Raised HB 5876: An Act Concerning Mandatory Life Sentences for Repeat Violent Offenders; Raised HB 5915: An Act Concerning Persistent Dangerous Felony Offenders and HB 5035: An Act Concerning Repeat Violent Offenders, Burglary and Pardons and Parole.

I wish to address the antiquated public safety model in Connecticut, which is epitomized by proposed legislative measures such as Three Strikes. There is already a persistent offender statute on the books to address repeat violent offenders, which can be used at the discretion of the prosecuting attorneys. Connecticut is in desperate need of a paradigm shift regarding its public safety model. The criminal justice system in this state disproportionately incarcerates black and Hispanic individuals. These ethnic groups comprise twenty percent of Connecticut's total population, while more than doubling this state's white prison population. Fifty percent of Connecticut's male prison population comes from Hartford, New Haven and Bridgeport.

These numbers are just the tip of the iceberg in terms of illustrating the racial inequity of criminal justice in this state, which is a Criminal Factory. The result is a pattern of generational recidivism that correlates to racial disparities in educational attainment, poverty and income levels. The key to breaking this cycle is the augmentation of alternative to incarceration programs, reintegration support for currently and formerly incarcerated individuals, in addition to substance abuse and mental health services. Governor Rell and certain state legislators are exploiting the Cheshire home invasion tragedy for political gain, by espousing "get tough" rhetoric that will placate their suburban voting base, until the next incident of violence touches their community.

Greater emphasis on reintegration support for currently and formerly incarcerated individuals, along with addressing the aforementioned societal inequities in this state, is the key to enhancing public safety in Connecticut. Three Strikes proponents wish to obscure this fact, because passing draconian sentencing measures is easier to sell and thus more beneficial to their political careers.

There is a Jim Crow-like flavor to Connecticut's current public safety model. Suburban residents are protected and served, while urban residents are monitored and incarcerated. Governor Rell must address this chasm by working with the residents of Hartford, New Haven, Bridgeport and other urban areas to find solutions to this state's public safety crisis. The Governor has called for special legislative sessions and emergency bills to address suburban tragedies, while ignoring calls from the Clean Slate Committee to discuss the plight of urban residents. This double standard is inexcusable and will not be tolerated. Governor Rell is morally and ethically bound to show equal dedication to improving public safety for all Connecticut residents.

Respectfully,

David Samuels