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**Testimony of state Senate Minority Leader John McKinney
before the Judiciary Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly**

RE: SB 641, An Act Concerning Repeat Violent Offenders

March 12, 2008

Good afternoon Chairmen McDonald and Lawlor, Ranking Members Kissel and O'Neill, and members of the Judiciary Committee. Thank you for this opportunity to testify today on behalf of the Senate Republican Caucus, in support of SB 641, An Act Concerning Repeat Violent Offenders.

Since last year's terrible tragedy in Cheshire awakened this legislature to the vast shortcomings of our criminal justice system, the Senate Republican caucus has intensified its efforts to pass substantive measures to improve public safety in Connecticut.

In an attempt to do just that, we have proposed legislation to enact a true "Three Strikes" law, whereby criminals who are convicted of a third violent felony may be sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole. We believe that such dangerous offenders, who have

three times inflicted serious bodily harm upon an innocent victim, should not be given another chance to repeat their crime.

During the recent special session, this General Assembly came together in a bipartisan manner and made several needed changes to our laws dealing with crimes and punishment. But we did not go far enough in establishing severe penalties for our most dangerous repeat felons – those who, when given the opportunity, will commit another rape, another robbery, another carjacking, another killing.

These violent criminals need to be taken off our streets to prevent future criminal activity and future innocent victims. This bill would provide prosecutors with a tool to do just that.

I wish to suggest a change to the language of the bill, to specify that “murder” constituting a strikeable offense under the bill is only such murders that do not rise to the level of a capital felony. This would prevent the unintended result of having a three time felon convicted of murder and eligible for the death penalty, argue that they should receive a life sentence instead.

This legislature, in a bipartisan way, has made some important steps toward improving public safety and toughening our criminal justice laws. We created the new crime of home invasion. We fixed the Constitutional flaws in our persistent felony offender laws pointed out by our Supreme Court. We provided for longer sentences for certain crimes, mandated that longer portions of sentences be served for others, and made some long overdue changes to our parole procedures. We took many steps in the name of public safety. But we stopped one step short when a majority of our colleagues decided not to pass a viable, workable “three strikes” law to help protect Connecticut residents from the worst of the worst violent criminals. I would ask that this year, we take that step together to make Connecticut safer for all of us.