

JUDICIARY COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING
March 20, 2008

RE: H.B. 5924 - An Act Establishing a Sentencing Commission
Submitted by Robert Farr, Chairman - Board of Pardons and Paroles & Acting
Chairman of the Connecticut Sentencing Task Force

Good afternoon Senator MacDonald, Representative Lawlor, and members of the Judiciary Committee. I am submitting this testimony in support of H.B. 5924; An Act Establishing a Sentencing Commission.

In 2006, the legislature created a Sentencing Task Force and charged the members to report back to them by December of 2008. This Sentencing Task Force has been a useful forum in which the key members representing various Connecticut's Criminal Justice System's have been able to discuss in an open forum proposals that would impact their agencies as well as the criminal justice system.

To date, the Task Force has supported two bills that were subsequently approved through the Judiciary Committee. The first was an act that created a diversionary program for persons with mental disabilities that was adopted in the January Special Session. The second was a bill titled 'Probation Terms and Offender Behavior' that allows for review and early termination of probation based on successful supervision.

The Task Force held lengthy discussions about burglary and home invasion statutes as well as the 'three strikes' legislation. We believe that these discussions that were broadcast on the Connecticut Network (CT-N) resulted in a greater dissemination of criminal justice information to members of the public as well as members of the General Assembly. These discussions allowed for a forum that identified and discussed all the pros and cons of the various criminal justice proposals.

Within the Task Force, we established four specific sub-committees: 1) Sentencing Structure; 2) Offense Classification; 3) Community Supervision and Alternative Sanctions; and 4) Disparity. These sub-committees were given various tasks such as reviewing and classifying our criminal statutes; identifying areas of racial and ethical disparity; holding community forums; and review of probation terms. An Interim Report has been drafted and submitted to the legislature identifying all their accomplishments.

If H.B. 5924 is passed, Connecticut will join the majority of states who have already established such commissions. These commissions perform functions ranging from acting as an advisory body to actually establishing sentencing guidelines. Some states authorize their commissions to regularly review their criminal statutes and make proposals for change. Others states require that all proposals must be filtered through the commission before they are presented to the legislature.

The Task Force has recommended that we create a permanent commission in order to continue this vehicle for dialogue between the various entities within the Connecticut's Criminal Justice System. Looking toward the future, we anticipate that this commission may be reshaped, but seek adoption of this permanent commission during this session due to the pending termination of the task force in December of this year. We recognize that this is a short session of the legislature and that there is very limited time left. Therefore, the Task Forces strongly urges you to pass this bill. Thank you for your time.