

6697

CCDLA  
"Ready in the Defense of Liberty"  
Founded 1988

Connecticut Criminal Defense  
Lawyers Association  
P.O. Box 1766  
Waterbury, CT 07621-1776  
(860) 283-5070 Phone/Fax  
[www.ccdla.com](http://www.ccdla.com)

March 24, 2009

Hon. Andrew J. McDonald, Senator  
Hon. Michael P. Lawlor, House Representative  
Committee on Judiciary  
Room 2500, Legislative Office Building  
Hartford, Connecticut 06106

Re: Raised House Bill 6697 An Act Establishing a Sentencing Commission

**TESTIMONY OF EDWARD GAVIN, PRESIDENT OF THE CONNECTICUT  
CRIMINAL DEFENSE LAWYERS ASSOCIATION,  
IN SUUPORT OF RAISED BILL 6697**

Dear Chairmen and Committee Members:

The Connecticut Criminal Defense Lawyers Association ("CCDLA") is a statewide organization of approximately 350 lawyers in both the public and private sectors dedicated to defending persons accused of criminal offenses. Founded in 1988, CCDLA works to improve the criminal justice system by insuring that the individual rights guaranteed by the Connecticut and United States Constitutions are applied fairly and equally, and that those rights are not diminished. At the same time, CCDLA strives to improve and suggest changes to the laws and procedures that apply to the criminal justice system.

The CCDLA supports raised Bill No. 6697 which would establish a Sentencing Commission in the State of Connecticut. We believe that the creation of this Commission, with a precise mission statement, designated membership, proposed duties, and delineated authority, as detailed in the proposed bill, would lay the groundwork for data driven, non-partisan, sentencing policy and reform. We support sentencing policies that are fiscally responsible and take into account racial impact analyses. This type of deliberate and focused evidence based research and analysis makes for sound criminal

justice policy. Too often in the past, enacted policy was based upon political necessity with little or no relationship toward the consequences to the criminal justice system and the people and agencies affected by such legislation.

We first note that our past-president and current board member, Attorney Thomas Ullmann, chaired the working group that drafted the proposal ultimately adopted by the Sentencing Task Force. The group consisted of well respected members of the judicial branch, legislature, criminal justice agencies, and academia. It is our belief that the proposal is one of the most important pieces of legislature to come out of the tragic Cheshire incident and is a global long term statement that frames a commitment by Connecticut to a rational, data driven sentencing policy.

Two concerns with this proposal have been alleviated. There appears to be unanimous agreement from all major criminal justice actors that a Sentencing Commission in Connecticut does not equate to sentencing guidelines. In addition, it appears that safeguards have been included in the proposal that would ensure that confidential data collected by the Sentencing Commission would remain confidential and would only be utilized for its research capacity.

What is laudable about the proposal is its collaborative and inclusive composition. It is politically balanced. It is represented fairly by each branch of government. It includes a representative of every criminal justice agency. It includes those community members who have played some role within the criminal justice system.

The Sentencing Task Force actually laid the groundwork for this proposal. It demonstrated that a collaborative effort by those who are sometimes adversaries in the day to day operation of the criminal justice system could reach agreement as to

legislation based upon negotiation and consensus. The mental health diversion bill, and probation modification legislation, enacted during the last legislative session, demonstrates what collaboration among reasonable people could achieve. The creation of a Sentencing Commission allows this to take place on a much larger scale and with a view of long term collaborative efforts.

The mission and duties of the Sentence Commission are noteworthy. They encompass public safety, offender accountability, harm to victims and the community, community punishment and supervision, the imposition of just punishment, and meaningful and effective rehabilitation and reintegration of the offender.

It had become obvious during Sentencing Task force meetings that there is a lack of coordinated data sharing as well as a lack of whole areas of data gathering. It is obvious that until recently and in great part still to this day, Connecticut state agencies gather data they deem important, but not necessarily oriented to the system as a whole. This leaves a rather unfocused and self centered data gathering system. The Sentencing Commission would change this. The commission would gather existing data from all parties. Not only would the Commission coordinate the gathering of that research, but it would also fill in the gaps. This is what is needed to explore the effectiveness of existing and proposed legislation. The Commission would also integrate a fiscal impact statement as well as the statutorily mandated racial diversity impact statement.

This bill is a huge step in the direction of a non-partisan approach to mindful evidenced based analysis and recommendations regarding existing and proposed sentencing legislation and policies.

**CONCLUSION**

We support building upon the relationships that were cultivated by the emergence of the legislatively mandated Sentencing Task Force. The logical extension of this working group toward the creation of a Sentencing Commission makes complete sense to us. We strongly urge passage of this bill creating a Sentencing Commission.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Edward Gavin". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "E".

EDWARD GAVIN  
President, CCDLA  
On Behalf of the Connecticut  
Criminal Defense Lawyers  
Association