~~6383~~ 6386
674
6578

TESTIMONY for JUDICIARY hearing -- March 2, 2009

•Opposition to 6 bills that would delay for 2 additional years the implementation of legislation to Raise the Age of adult to 18 for most criminal prosecutions. (bills are 638~~3~~6, 674, ~~534~~, ~~5237~~, ~~5451~~, 6~~019~~)

•Support of SB539 and HB5459 to Abolish the Death Penalty

Every day we hear about our state's financial crisis and the need for cuts to programs and jobs. Because of "Raise the Age" legislation passed in 2007, we have the opportunity to reduce spending in one area that will also be a benefit to crime prevention. CT is one of only 3 states that automatically send 16- and 17-year-old youth offenders to the adult system. The juvenile justice system, which is less costly than the adult penal system, should be used for lawbreakers in this age category. Moreover, minors who remain in the juvenile system, where they have greater access to counseling and education, are far less likely to get involved in more serious crimes than peers prosecuted as adults. This makes us all safer, and saves taxpayer money.

I simply cannot understand why Governor Rell and Republican lawmakers have proposed an additional 2-year delay to implementation of "Raise the Age". Time and money have already been spent since 2007 planning for implementation in 2010. **We do not allow youth under 18 to vote, sign a contract, purchase liquor, or enroll in the regular military. Why should we say they become "adults" when they get in trouble?** Let's be consistent in defining who is a juvenile, and place these youthful offenders where they belong, and as soon as possible.

In purely financial terms, by switching most youth out of the more costly adult penal system, there would be more taxpayer dollars available for our state universities, public schools, HUSKY and other programs for young people. If the Governor and certain legislators don't care about helping troubled youth become better citizens, they should at least pick the more cost-effective manner of dealing with them.

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Here's another cost-saving measure for our state: Abolish the Death Penalty. People are often surprised to hear that it costs less to keep an individual in prison for life than to pay for everything associated with capitol punishment. The threat of the death penalty is not a deterrent; otherwise those states that have it should have fewer homicides, which is not the case. Then there's the possibility of mistakes; I happen to know personally an individual wrongfully convicted of murder. What if he had been given a death sentence?

So what is left as "good reasons" for capitol punishment? ...revenge and retribution, for the taking someone else's life. I can understand that sentiment. But almost all murderers are given Life sentences or a very long incarceration, which is very harsh punishment, and also provides public safety. Only a handful get a death sentence, which is carried out years after their crime. Not only should we question whether the State itself should be participating in a killing, but also I really cannot see the advantage to Connecticut taxpayers of using their dollars to kill someone. Put the money saved into rehabilitation and into prevention of violence in our communities. That's real public safety.

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