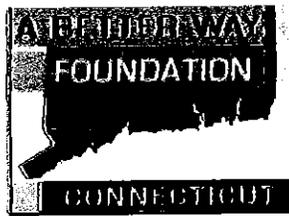


LaResse Harvey, BSW
Policy Director
A Better Way Foundation
March 19, 2010



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.

Good Morning Members of the Judiciary Committee,

I am testifying today in support of the following raised bills: **H.B. 5523 AN ACT CONCERNING REENTRY, S.B. 476 AN ACT CONCERNING NONVIOLENT DRUG POSSESSION OFFENSES, S.B. 475 AN ACT CONCERNING NONVIOLENT OFFENDERS, and H. B. 5525 AN ACT CONCERNING PARDONS.**

A Better Way Foundation (ABWF) is a Connecticut-based organization dedicated to shifting current drug policy from a paradigm that prioritizes incarceration to one that prioritizes public health, treatment and public safety. ABWF engages in research, education, advocacy and organizing in order to enable progressive drug policy reform and criminal justice agendas. ABWF develops and trains future activists of the drug policy, criminal justice reform and public safety communities by using organizing principles with a focus on resident and community empowerment.

Despite its reputation as a progressive state, Connecticut not only has one of the highest incarceration rates of all Northeastern states, the state justice system also leads the nation in racial disparities (68.9% prison population is Blacks & Latinos). ABWF's work was borne of the need to resist reactionary public policies that have resulted in the incarceration of tens of thousands of Connecticut citizens for drug offenses and nonviolent crimes. Raised **H.B. 5523 AN ACT CONCERNING REENTRY, S.B. 476 AN ACT CONCERNING NONVIOLENT DRUG POSSESSION OFFENSES, S.B. 475 AN ACT CONCERNING NONVIOLENT OFFENDERS, and H. B. 5525 AN ACT CONCERNING PARDONS** continues the justice reinvestment work this legislative body started decades ago. These bills restore social and human capital in Connecticut and increase public safety, while reducing recidivism.

For a decade, A Better Way Foundation has worked to eliminate barriers everyday people face do to the multiple ways mass incarceration and the war on drugs is crippling our society. A Better Way Foundation believes in family preservation and restoring justice for those unintended consequences because of draconian laws that destroyed and continues to destroy the lives of so many children and families in Connecticut.

Raised **H.B. 5523 AN ACT CONCERNING REENTRY, S.B. 476 AN ACT CONCERNING NONVIOLENT DRUG POSSESSION OFFENSES, S.B. 475 AN ACT CONCERNING NONVIOLENT OFFENDERS, and H. B. 5525 AN ACT CONCERNING PARDONS** is economically sound and safe legislation. There are over 200,000 people with felony convictions in Connecticut that can benefit from the revised provisional pardon and removing the question, "have you ever been convicted of a felony" from state and private employment applications. There are 3,200 citizens incarcerated who can benefit from the nonviolent offenders bill, not to mention the significant amount of cost savings and revenue with the reclassification of small amounts of cannabis-type substance and drug paraphernalia as an infraction. Thank you for your time and continue support to restore justice to all Connecticut's citizen young and old.

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