

March 8, 2011

Re: Letter in Support of Raised Bills No. 6539 An Act Concerning Sentence Modification & 6475 An Act Concerning Mandatory Minimum Sentences

Dear Judiciary Committee Members:

My name is Janice T. Flemming and I am the CEO of VOWOC. On behalf of the Voices of Women of Color (VOWOC), we would like to first thank you for allowing our organization to submit a testimony in favor of HB 6475 An Act Concerning Mandatory Minimum Sentences.

The VOWOC is a for profit organization in the city of Hartford. Our mission is to create a safe space for women of color to come together in one voice as one community for the liberation of all oppressed people in the areas of voting, housing, and employment.

Since 2009, the VOWOC held over 200 house parties in the city of Hartford. These house parties were designed to engage residents in frank and candied conversations about non-violent drug crimes. During our fact-finding and discovery of issues, we discovered that mandatory sentences have led to considerably longer incarceration sentences.

In addition, the VOWOC witness firsthand how mandatory minimums have broken and disrupted families for the long term. Mandatory Minimums has also contributed to homelessness, increased DCF case numbers, and have amplified the poverty rate in the city of Hartford significantly. More specifically, mandatory minimums disproportionately affect Black and Latino defendants at a much higher rate than their Caucasian counterparts in cities like Hartford.

In Connecticut, Blacks are 12 times more likely to be in prison than whites. Latinos are 6 times more likely. What this outdated criminal system has created is 1 out of 6 children in Hartford have a parent in jail. This is not acceptable. If we are truly serious about getting Connecticut out of a deficit then we must see House Bill 6475 An Act Concerning Mandatory Minimum Sentences as part of the solution.

Currently, Connecticut is spending over 40,000 to house a person in our state's prisons. Hundreds of millions of dollars are lost each year because of an outdated criminal justice system. The State of CT can begin to recover those monies with the passing on HB 6475 An Act Concerning Mandatory Minimum.

The VOWOC asks our elected officials and this General Assembly to pass HB 6475 An Act Concerning Mandatory Minimum so that we can begin to reunite families.

Again, thank you and have a nice day.

Janice T. Flemming

CEO

Voices of Women of Color (VOWOC)