



Advocacy for Children with Disabilities

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Thank you for allowing us to submit testimony on behalf of African Caribbean American Parents of Children with Disabilities (AFCAMP), in support of H.B. 5546, An Act Concerning Sentence Modification of Juveniles. AFCAMP is a parent-run, family organization in the state of Connecticut that provides education, advocacy and support to parents raising children with disabilities, for the purpose of improving their children's education and quality of life. We serve thousands of low-income families in Hartford, New Haven and throughout the state.

There is a documented high rate of confluence between children with juvenile justice contact and children with disabilities and mental health disorders. AFCAMP endeavors to advocate for important reform in the juvenile justice system in Connecticut. We believe that H.B. 5546 is such an important reform measure. We strongly urge the Sentencing Commission to study the feasibility of creating a procedure to allow juvenile offenders serving lengthy sentences a meaningful opportunity, after service of a portion of the sentence, to obtain release before the end of that term by demonstrating increased maturity and rehabilitation.

Currently, our state provides no meaningful opportunity for release for juvenile offenders serving long sentences. Sadly, the burden of serving long sentences has fallen disproportionately on minorities: 90% of individuals serving sentences of 10 years or more for crimes committed under age 18 are African American or Hispanic. Questions must be raised about the extreme disproportionate number of minority juveniles serving long sentences. In addition, we urge the Commission to take into account the established scientific evidence on adolescents having underdeveloped brains making them more impulsive, susceptible to peer pressure, and lacking in foresight than adults. Implications of this evidence as it concerns juveniles' level of culpability and likelihood of successful rehabilitation have recently been reviewed in the U.S. Supreme Court case of *Graham v. Florida*, 130 S. Ct. 2011 (2010).

We wish to point out that the cost of providing juvenile offenders serving long sentences a meaningful opportunity of release would be small. There are only 191 individuals serving sentences of more than 10 years based solely on offenses committed under the age of 18. Review would occur after the individual has served a significant period of his or her sentence. Because each person is serving a different sentence, hearings would be staggered and the cost of review would not be significant. Public safety would not be jeopardized because a second look would in no way guarantee release.

Thank you for your time and consideration.