

Testimony of Danielle McGee, Quinnipiac Law School Black Law Students Association

Judiciary Committee

March 23, 2012

H.R. No. 5546, An Act Concerning Sentencing Modification for Juveniles

Senator Coleman, Representative Fox, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify in support of this legislation. My name is Danielle McGee, and I am the Vice President of the Quinnipiac Law School Black Law Students Association. I am speaking on behalf of our local chapter regarding H.R. No. 5546. I urge the legislature to provide a method of review to individuals serving lengthy sentences for crimes committed under the age of eighteen.

QU BLSA is a local chapter of the National Black Law Students Association. NBLSA is the largest student run organization in the United States and is composed of six regions and over 200 chapters, including QU BLSA. On the local and national level, our goal is not only to articulate the needs and objectives of Black law students, but to also work towards addressing the needs of the Black community by bringing about meaningful legal and political change.

The National Black Law Students Association, as part of its Judicial Advocacy Program, recently joined the Juvenile Law Center in an Amicus Curiae brief to the U.S. Supreme Court for two important cases: *Miller v. Alabama* and *Jackson v. Arkansas*. The brief argued that life without the possibility of parole is unconstitutional when imposed on juveniles for homicide offenses. In 2010, the U.S. Supreme Court in *Graham v. Florida* held that it is unconstitutional to sentence juveniles to life without parole for non-homicide offenses.

Due to the activity of our national organization and our chapter based initiatives, and the compelling need for reform in this area, we support An Act Concerning Sentencing Modification for Juveniles.

In Connecticut, we face a great disparity in our criminal justice system. While only 10 percent of our state population is Black, we represent 42% of the incarcerated population. This grave disparity is exacerbated when one looks specifically at those who committed crimes under the age of eighteen: Blacks and Hispanics represent 85% of the individuals serving adult sentences of more than three years for crimes committed as juveniles. As the length of these sentence increases to ten years, 25 years, and 50 years, so does the percentage represented by Black offenders. This data reveals that Black youth are being incarcerated more, and for longer periods of time, than their White counterparts. With these figures, it is clear why Connecticut has the fourth highest discrepancy in the nation when it comes to the rate of incarceration for Blacks and Whites.

For these reasons, it is imperative that the Legislature consider reform in this area. Not only is this a national concern, but the disparity in our own state is alarming and problematic. This bill provides an opportunity to address this issue.

Sincerely,

Danielle McGee

Vice President, Quinnipiac Law School Black Law Students Association

Northeast Director of Alumni Affairs, National Black Law Students Association