

Testimony of Nia Holston, Black Student Alliance, Yale College

SB No. 1062, An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Connecticut Sentencing Commission Regarding the Sentencing of a Child Convicted of a Felony Offense

And,

HB No. 6581, An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the CT Sentencing Commission Regarding Lengthy Sentences for Crimes Committed By a Child or Youth

March 11th, 2013

My name is Nia Holston, and I am a junior at Yale University. I am the Political Action Chair for the Black Student Alliance at Yale, and we express our voices in support for SB No 1062, and HB No. 6581, regarding juvenile sentencing reforms.

We know that in Connecticut, children ages 14 to 17 that are charged with certain crimes are automatically tried in adult court and subject to mandatory lengthy adult prison terms. We believe this is an unjust manifestation of our broken criminal justice system, and that if we wish to live in a more equitable society, we must move to end this practice.

Researchers have unequivocally shown that juvenile brains are underdeveloped, and are prone to more impulsive thinking, which can lead to rash, sometimes even tragic decisions. Researchers have also shown that harsh adult sentences are not mandated evenly; often, black juvenile offenders are given harsher sentences than white juvenile offenders.

Swift legislative action is necessary. In June of 2012, in *Miller v. Alabama*, the Supreme Court held that mandatory sentences of life without parole for juveniles violate the Eight Amendment's ban on cruel and unusual punishment. We urge the Judiciary Committee to take the right course of action, and pass these recommendations.