

Date: March 11, 2013

To: Judiciary Committee Members

From: Tawana M. Bourne

Re: H.B. 6581, Sentencing Commission Proposal on Juvenile Sentencing Reconsideration;  
Mr. Ira Alston

I am in agreement with the United States Supreme Court when it says that "juveniles have lessened culpability and are less deserving of the most severe punishments". Many of the incarcerated children turned adults within Connecticut's prison systems are victims themselves who experienced less fortunate adverse traumatic childhood experiences. These children, during their early life experiences, were most likely reared in toxic homes, were educated in low academic performing toxic education systems and were exposed to chronic poverty and violence in their toxic neighborhoods and communities. The severity of the toxicity in the early years of a child's life clearly does not afford them the advantage, privilege or opportunity necessary for them to evolve into whole, healthy and complete well rounded adults, as in the case of Mr. Ira Alston.

I have had the privilege of knowing Mr. Alston approaching five years. During my tenure of getting to know Mr. Alston, I have learned how and why the limited protective factors in his life as a child may have contributed to his behavior as a youth, resulting in him at the age of 16 to being sentenced to serve a 36 year prison sentence. From my understanding, Mr. Alston was exposed to severe penury, drugs, crime and violence since his infancy (the most pivotal time of a child's life when neuroscience suggest that brain development is most crucial) and into his young adulthood. The constant exposure to environmental and familial stressors early in Mr. Alston's life has caused detrimental effects on his mental capacity and emotional development, resulting in blight judgments and impaired behaviors. It is unfair and unreasonable to expect Mr. Alston and children who experienced similar early adverse traumatic childhood experiences to exhibit appropriate and acceptable societal behaviors especially

when they were not exposed to proper nurturance, guidance and instruction and lacked the appropriate parental/caregiver/community nourishment that one needs to mature into a successful member of society.

Within the last several years, Connecticut has made tremendous progress in its juvenile justice system. Yet, competent and complete reformation is still not accomplished because Connecticut's Department of Corrections still houses an overwhelming number of individuals, such as Mr. Alston, who were sentenced as juveniles to long, harsh, cruel and unusual prison terms. Mr. Alston and those like him are not bad people. In fact, from the perspective of unconditional positive regard, Mr. Alston and those like him are indeed good and decent people who may have made poor choices. Because of this, I support Juvenile Sentence Reconsideration in the state of Connecticut for individuals who have demonstrated maturity and rehabilitation. These individuals should be afforded the opportunity to be released before serving the maximum term of the imposed lengthy prison sentence, especially because they were sentenced as children.

Therefore, I urge to pass H.B. 6581.