

Committee Bill No. 123
An Act Repealing the Risk Reduction Earned Credit Program
Testimony of Kimberly Oryell

Distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Kimberly Oryell and I would like to submit testimony in favor of Committee Bill 123; An Act Repealing the Risk Reduction Earned Credit Program. For the record, I am the former president for Survivors of Homicide, however my testimony is of my own opinion and is not representative of the opinions of all those effected by such tragedy as I have.

My Uncle Jerry Barnette was murdered on September 11, 2003 by a man who was a convicted felon several times over having spent more than half is 34 years on earth in various prisons. Due to a complacent and utterly irresponsible prosecutor, the suspect and his step-son who did confess to the crime were released after only 3 years in prison with no trial and no conviction for the murder of my beloved uncle. Knowing that the only 2 suspects were released and no justice was provided despite self-incrimination and a lengthy rap sheet because the person charged with achieving justice lost the evidence and violated the rights of the alleged offenders made me physically ill. That was the day I swore I would fight for the rights of victims and the innocent tax paying citizens of this country above and beyond all else.

To make it clear...Risk Reduction is not only a failed concept, but it is a huge lie. When confronted about this bill that was discretely inserted to pass in 2011, and after a Meriden convenience store owner was murdered by a convict released on probation with 191 days Risk Reduction Credits, Under-secretary Lawlor adamantly declared that the said offender spent more time in prison under the new Risk Reduction Credit Program than if the law not been in place. After researching the parole and risk reduction processes, I realized that the math does not add up. Prior to Risk Reduction going into effect, a prisoner had to serve 85% of their sentence before being eligible for parole. After it was enacted, the same was true, but the 85% they were required to serve was the original sentence minus the risk reduction credit days...therefore how can anyone firmly state that criminals are in prison longer now than they would have been prior to the bill going into effect? Furthermore, how can it be that the said offender, who had 4 probation violations prior to the crime in Meriden that robbed a family and a community a loving husband, father and hardworking taxpayer, not have been returned to prison at such time that his violations were found before he had a chance to escalate his criminal activity.

I question the how such credits are implemented and how it really is determined when they are issued. Those inmates who are clearly a risk to the officers of the prison as well as fellow inmates as stated in their case files should not be receiving any such credit for release. Knowing the offender in the Meriden case was indeed feared by all who knew him while in prison, yet issued such credits, makes me angry. If he cannot behave in an obedient fashion while in the confines of the prison walls, what chance would the rest of us have against a monster the prison system could not tame? It is also my understanding that this particular offender along with others received retroactive credits for programs not completed. According to the law this legislature passed, the Department of Corrections had no choice but to release this inmate along with countless others...many of who are already back in prison leaving a trail of helpless victims in their wake.

It is clear to me that although some criminals can be released and lead productive and law abiding lives, many will resort to their former lives and we have a revolving door on the prison. I would support maintaining the Risk Reduction program for low risk offenders as it does possess some benefit as it could save the tax payers millions of dollars per year. However if you do the math, releasing inmates who are a clear danger to public safety and have a complete disregard for the law will in turn cost the taxpayers more than if they had completed their time the old fashion way. Not only will there be another case to solve but there will be another trial and more appeals as well as the obvious re-incarceration. If Risk Reduction is not repealed, at the very least for violent and repeat offenders, the cost could exceed the benefit in terms of dollars and risk of injury or even death to TAX PAYING and law abiding citizens of Connecticut.

You have a duty to do all in your power to protect the safety of your citizens from a known threat and ensure justice is served in all cases. Risk Reduction was a lie and is a failed concept. 2 murders have resulted directly from RREC while countless high risk offenders such as serial rapists are receiving them too. How would you feel to learn a loved one of yours was murdered or raped because the system released them earlier than they should have been simply because this law forces them to. I ask this committee to repeal risk reduction immediately for high risk and repeat offenders and see that all those who will no longer qualify for such credits be forced to forfeit them retroactively.

Thank you all so much for your time and consideration.

Kimberly Oryell