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Public Testimony regarding SB H.B. No. 6511: An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Connecticut Sentencing Commission Regarding the Enhanced Penalty for the Sale or Possession of Drugs Near Schools, Day Care Centers and Public Housing Projects.

Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Frank Cervo. I am the President of UConn's chapter of Students for Sensible Drug Policy (SSDP), an international grassroots organization pushing for sensible policy reform regarding drugs and their effects on society. Drug abuse is a very serious problem with no simple solution, but in many cases, our current drug policies are more damaging to society than the drugs themselves. One such case is the enhanced penalty for the possession or sale of drugs near schools, day care centers and public housing projects.

The intention of these enhanced penalties is to prevent individuals from using drugs with or near children or selling drugs to them. This is a very legitimate concern and individuals engaging in these activities deserve enhanced penalties. However, with the law as it stands, many individuals receive the enhanced penalties without involving children at all.

This is especially apparent at the University of Connecticut. I pay very close attention to drug law enforcement on and around our campus, and one thing that I have noticed is that many students arrested for drug possession are charged with possession in a school zone. This is due to the fact that several residence halls are placed within 1500 feet of E.O. Smith High School. Buckley Hall, which houses the freshman Honors community, is one such building, and so many of our brightest incoming students with the potential to do great things for our state receive enhanced penalties for something that would have been a lighter charge in a different residence hall.

This issue is especially personal to me not only as a member of the UConn Honors Program and former resident of Buckley Hall, but as someone who, without the sensible reforms made to the Higher Education Act, would not have been eligible for the scholarship that funds my education and would not be here speaking to you today. The enhanced penalties for the possession or sale of drugs near schools, day care centers and public housing projects are stripping individuals just like myself of these opportunities and countless others, including financial aid, jobs, housing, and parenthood.

Please consider my testimony and support H.B. 6511 to shrink the radius of the defined school zone so as to prevent those individuals who were not involving children in their activities from receiving the enhanced penalties.

Sincerely,
Frank Cervo
President
UConn Students for Sensible Drug Policy
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