



Public Testimony regarding HB 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 Kevin Oliveira and I am currently a resident of Storrs, CT and an engineering student at the University of Connecticut. I am also an executive board member of UConn's chapter of Students for Sensible Drug Policy. As such, I follow closely how our state's drug policies affect the people around me. I have personally seen and experienced a handful of situations where these drug-free school zone policies have taken offenses of mere possession of a decriminalized substance and increased the penalties because the location was within a certain radius of a school zone, despite there being no interaction with said school or students from that school. I will attest to the fact that drugs do need to be kept out of our schools and out of the hands of our youth, but to take that idea and have it be such an overarching policy that it is detrimentally affecting the lives of bright, young college students for committing otherwise meager offenses is just unfair.

The situation at the University of Connecticut is hardly as bad as it gets – only a few of the campus' dormitories fall into the radius of the drug free school zone. The real problems in the state of Connecticut are in densely populated urban areas. In any of Connecticut's largest municipalities, be it Hartford, New Haven, Bridgeport, or any other big city, the majority of the entire city falls into the category of 'an area near a school, day care center, or public housing'. For the residents of these cities, getting caught with what the state of Connecticut has deemed a decriminalized amount of marijuana still results in similar punishment to not having the substance decriminalized at all. This would be all fine and good if the people getting in trouble were actually committing crimes that are affecting the areas that the state wants to protect, but the fact is people are just getting unfairly punished for being in a subjectively more illegal location while breaking the law.

One additional point where our current policies falter is with the primary demographics that they are affecting. As I said, these laws affect those in urban areas the most, as there are few locations that don't fall into a school zone. It just so happens that these urban areas are also highly populated with individuals of low income. Unfortunately for those low income residents of urban areas, the result is them being targeted for enhanced penalties on crimes that would otherwise be punished significantly less harshly in a different location. The state of Connecticut simply doesn't need to make life more difficult than it already is for these families.

I ask you to please be sensible and pass HB 6511, as the current laws are ensnaring unintended populations who do not deserve the enhanced penalty.

Sincerely,  
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