HARTFORD
BRIDGEPORT
NORWICH
STAMFORD

CONNECTICUT CATHOLIC PUBLIC AFFAIRS CONFERENCE, INC.
134 FARMINGTON AVENUE
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06105-3784

MICHAEL C. CULHANE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

DEACON DAVID W. REYNOLDS
LEGISLATIVE LIAISON

Testimony of Michael C. Culhane
Executive Director
Connecticut Catholic Public Affairs Conference

Judiciary Committee
March 11, 2013
Legislative Office Building, Room 2C

SB 1062, *An Act Concerning The Recommendations Of The Connecticut Sentencing Commission Regarding The Sentencing Of A Child Convicted Of A Felony Offense*

HB 6581, *An Act Concerning The Recommendations Of The Connecticut Sentencing Commission Regarding Lengthy Sentences For Crimes Committed By A Child or Youth*

Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Michael C. Culhane and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Catholic Public Affairs Conference. The CCPAC is the public policy office of the Catholic Bishops of Connecticut and the Archbishop of Hartford, the Most Reverend Henry J. Mansell, is the Chairman of the Conference's Board of Directors. I am submitting this testimony in support of SB 1062 and HB 6581 which provides a "second look" at long sentences imposed on youth.

On behalf of the Conference, I urge the Connecticut General Assembly to enact legislation allowing a person sentenced to a lengthy term of imprisonment for a crime committed under the age of eighteen to seek release under parole supervision after serving a portion of the sentence. Such legislation will help ensure that all youth are held accountable for their actions in an age-appropriate manner.

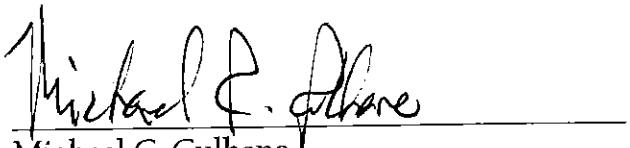
As the Judiciary Committee considers the proposed bills, I urge members to consider the well-established scientific evidence that proves the fundamental differences between youth and adults. Recent research shows that children do not have adult levels of judgment, impulse control, or ability to assess risks, and we know that they are more susceptible than adults to negative influences and outside pressures, including peer

pressure. This scientific evidence illustrates the fact that "juveniles have lessened culpability," which, according to the Supreme Court, means that "they are less deserving of the most severe punishments." In fact, the Supreme Court has determined – three times in the last seven years – that youth must be treated differently than adults because they have a unique potential for change and rehabilitation. These decisions underscore the importance of providing youth convicted of serious crimes meaningful and frequent sentencing reviews after a portion of their time is served.

SB 1062 recognizes this capacity in youth, eliminating life without parole sentences for juveniles and allowing judges to consider youth-related factors in sentencing juveniles transferred to adult court. HB 6581 would further achieve this objective by affording youth serving sixty years or less parole eligibility after one-half of their sentence or ten years, whichever is longer, and those serving sentences of more than 60 years parole eligibility after serving 30 years. This legislation would not guarantee release, but rather would give juvenile offenders serving lengthy sentences the opportunity to show they have grown, matured, worked diligently to change their ways, and made amends for their mistakes.

The Connecticut Catholic Public Affairs Conference supports sound public policy that promotes accountability and keeps communities safe through the recognition of fundamental differences between youth and adults. Meaningful "second look" provisions do not allow for the premature release of inmates serving time in prison for serious offenses. Instead, they ensure that youth convicted of serious crimes have the chance to work towards release if they can prove, later in life, that they have been rehabilitated.

I appreciate the Committee's attention to this important issue.



Michael C. Culhane
Executive Director