Good morning members of the Judiciary Committee:
My name is Barbara Fair and I am writing in support of ***HB6581*** which provides parole eligibility for juveniles serving lengthy prison sentences and ***SB1062*** which eliminates mandatory life-without parole-sentences for juveniles and allows judges to consider youth-related factors before sentencing juveniles transferred into the adult court.
I am here today as a state licensed clinical social worker and also representing My Brother's Keeper, a grassroots organization working toward mending what we perceive as a very broken criminal justice and prison system.

As a clinical social worker I recognize, as many of you likely do that children are very much unlike adults and decisions they make as children are unlikely the ones they make as an adult. Brain development has all to do with the difference in processing. We don't need some child development expert to convince us that children's brains function on a lower level than an adult and as a result are prone to making many mistakes in decision making. Sometimes those "mistakes" can be deadly and yet the fact remains they are children, unable to grasp the seriousness of the choices they make. It's why parents are decision makers in a child's life and it's why lawmakers establish laws to protect them from being victimized as well to protect them from themselves. It is why we establish laws that prevent them from sitting on a jury, from holding public office, from entering contracts, from entering the military, from marrying and even from engaging in sexual behavior because we recognize their brains have not reached a certain level of maturity. Because we recognize these things it is senseless to then view them as adults when they become involved in criminal behavior. We can't have it both ways. If we acknowledge that children are more impulsive, more impressionable, more susceptible to peer pressure, generally lack adult insight and come from toxic environments which they cannot free themselves from, then how do we justify establishing laws that transfer children to adult courts as though these factors don't matter?

In Connecticut there are nearly 300 individuals who fit the criteria of Miller v, Alabama and Graham v.Florida. Among those individuals nearly 90% are children of color. In examining those facts alone one might conclude either children of color are highly criminal or racial disparity is inherent within policy making in Connecticut. We must address any perception of racial injustice.

The Supreme Court held that it is unconstitutional to treat children as though they are adults and have required states to review cases in which children were given lengthy sentences for actions that transpired prior to their 18th birthday. It has said that children serving harsh sentences ***must*** be allowed a "meaningful opportunity" to redeem themselves. It is not negotiable. It is a mandate and Connecticut must comply. The question is how long will it take for legislators to rectify what's wrong with our system of justice?

A very wise person once said that one way society is judged is the way they treat their young . So, what do laws that treat children as though they are adults say about us as a society? I recall a time when 30 years was a harsh sentence for an adult. Today we are sentencing children to life sentences without any possibility of ever being free again, sentences of 50, 60,80 years. We must ask ourselves, what have we become as a society and where are we heading?

Thank you for your time and the opportunity to be heard.