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Association of Women Executives in Corrections

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"Each One . . . Teach One"

March 11, 2013

Judiciary Committee, Connecticut General Assembly
Legislative Office Building
300 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06115

Re: Testimony in Support of SB 1062 and HB 6581

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee:

The Association of Women Executives in Corrections submits this testimony in support of legislation to provide a "second look" at long sentences imposed on youth. **AWEC's Mission** is to provide leadership development for executive women, to support the career advancement of women in corrections and to promote informed discussion of correctional issues in an atmosphere of mutual respect. To support our mission, AWEC urges 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, we 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.

AWEC 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.

We appreciate the Committee's attention on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Kathy Waters, AWEC President