



*Ad Maiorem Dei Gloriam*

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

RE: Testimony in Support of SB 1062 and HB 6581

March 8, 2013

Dear Members of the Judiciary Committee:

As the Provincial of the New England Province of the Society of Jesus, I submit this testimony to urge you to support legislation to provide a “second look” at long sentences imposed on youth. The New England Province is one of nine U.S. regions of the Society of Jesus or Jesuits, a Catholic religious order of priests and brothers serving the Church in educational, pastoral and spiritual ministries. Jesuits of the New England Province serve as teachers, campus ministers and administrators at universities, high schools, and Nativity middle schools, including Fairfield Preparatory School and Fairfield University in the state of Connecticut. We also serve in parishes and as chaplains in hospitals, prisons and the military.

I write today on behalf of the Province to ask the Connecticut General Assembly to enact legislation to allow 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 is an important step towards ensuring that all youth are held accountable for their actions in an age-appropriate manner.

In Bridgeport and New Haven, Connecticut, our students at Fairfield Prep and Fairfield University work alongside community partners with low-income youth in the classroom and after school tutoring and mentoring programs. Our faculty members are engaged in research on juvenile justice reform. Our staff members are actively involved with community organizations like RYASAP and the Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance working to codify appropriate sentencing guidelines for court involved youth and help juvenile offenders return to our communities. Through these interactions, we are well aware of the challenges facing inner-city youth in Connecticut, realities that result in some young adults serving time in detention. However, we also know the capacity of these same youth for growth, change and reconciliation.

As the Judiciary Committee considers the proposed bills, we urge members to consider 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, in the eyes of 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 New England Province of the Society of Jesus supports sound public policy that recognizes the fundamental difference between youth and adults, promotes accountability and keeps communities safe. 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, they have been rehabilitated.

We appreciate the Committee’s consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Myles N. Sheehan SJ". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

V. Rev. Myles N. Sheehan, S.J.  
Provincial