



March 3, 2014

Testimony of Emma Janger
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100 Tower Parkway, 113
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In favor: H.B. No. 5221

An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Connecticut Sentencing Commission Regarding Lengthy Sentences for Crimes Committed by a Child or Youth and the Sentencing of a Child or Youth Convicted of Certain Felony Offenses

My name is Emma Janger, I'm President of the College Democrats of Connecticut, and am here to speak in favor of House Bill Number 5221. The current system of sentencing juveniles to life sentences without parole is an injustice. The College Dems of Connecticut urge the General Assembly to pass this bill.

In 2012 the Supreme Court in *Miller v. Alabama*, prohibited the imposition of a life sentence without the possibility of parole, for a child under the age of 18 when they committed the offense for which they were prosecuted in adult court. Currently, children, in this state, as young as 14, are sentenced to mandatory sentences in excess of 50 years without even having the opportunity to seek parole. They are denied the hope of a productive life in society for crimes committed when they were still children.

As the majority states in *Miller v. Alabama*: "Children are constitutionally different from adults ... Juveniles have diminished culpability and greater prospects for reform ... [and] are less deserving of the most severe punishments ... Children have a lack of maturity and an underdeveloped sense of responsibility; ... children are more vulnerable ... to negative influences and outside pressures; ... and ... a child's character is not as well formed as an adult's."

Adolescents also have a potential for development and rehabilitation that is distinctly greater than that of adults. To deny them parole, and sentence them to life, and death in prison, is to deny them this chance for a new life. And the chance to become a productive member of our society.

When they are sentenced to life without parole young men and women are sentenced to die in prison for a crime that they committed when, as the Supreme Court emphasizes, they were not fully developed and were vulnerable to the influence of their surrounding environment. To punish them as adults, for actions they undertook at 14 is insane.

Currently the Connecticut sentencing practices do not permit Judges to take into account the mitigating factor of a defendant's youth. This is directly opposed to the decision of the Supreme Court. The law, as it stands in Connecticut, is unconstitutional.

Therefore, the General Assembly should pass this law to reform the sentencing practices for juveniles, so that they are both constitutional and humane.

Sentencing juveniles to life without parole is also harmful to our State. Prisons cost money and are currently a huge part of the Connecticut state budget. Young men and women with no hope of getting out of prison, and no hope of a better life, have little incentive for good behavior in prison; this leads to needing more guards and more disciplinary action. Not only is this a tragic way to live one's life, but it increases the cost of our prison system. Because the Supreme Court in *Graham v. Florida*, 2010 stated that all children sentenced to life without parole in non-homicide cases must have a "meaningful opportunity for release" there are currently over 60 pending lawsuits by people unlawfully sentenced to life in prison. This further increases the cost to the state. We are spending money to litigate an issue that is unjust and unconstitutional.

To be frank, the people most affected by this injustice look nothing like me. But the Connecticut law as it stands is unconstitutional, inhumane, and a drain on the limited resources of our state. Therefore I must speak out and urge you all to pass House Bill 5221.