



Trinity College

HARTFORD CONNECTICUT

February 28th, 2014

To Whom it May Concern:

I am writing with regard to Bill HB 5221 that addresses the right of juveniles with very long sentences to have their cases looked at again, at another interval, a second time.

I have been a professor of Theater and Dance at Trinity College for 42 years and Founder and Executive/Artistic Director of the Judy Dworin Performance Project for 24 years. I have been leading education and arts intervention programs at York CI for the past eight years. Several of the women that I work with in the arts engagement workshops that I lead were sentenced at a very young age and have been at York for many years already. The woman that each is presently represents a significant evolution from the time she committed the crime for which she is now serving time. I see such growth and, not to overstate it, transformations occur in these young women. They are seeking whatever avenues are available to improve themselves—taking advantage of the arts and educational offerings and making tremendous progress. They are smart, talented, and show such great potential. And yet some of them face 10, 20 and even 30 more years of prison time.

It seems to be not only prudent, but also critical to re-examine the cases of these women (and men) who received these enormous sentences sometimes when they were as young as 14 years old, at an interval that might allow a reconsideration of their status. Perhaps on a re-examination, the benefits of the extensive sentences that they face might be seen in a different light. And perhaps not. But at least there would be an opportunity to assess this before a life since age 14 or 15 is lived 50 years behind bars.

Before I began my work at York, I might not have had this opinion. I, like so many, did not give those in prison much thought. But my work at York has afforded me the kind of insight that I wish were available to more of us. The people that reside at York are human beings, subject to grave errors and also capable of great change. The choices of youths, many of whom have led battered lives exposed to the streets, sexual and physical abuse, drug-addicted parents and family members, and more, can be wrong-headed and damaging, but whether the punishments that have been assigned are appropriate is another matter. I urge those in a position to decide to allow these bills to pass, and to offer therefore the sound and humane opportunities they afford youthful offenders—the possibility of much fairer treatment under the law.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

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DEPARTMENT OF THEATER & DANCE

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