Department of Correction
Testimony of Eric Ellison, Parole Manager

Judiciary Committee
March 12, 2014

Raised Bill No. 5449, AN ACT CONCERNING RESIDENCY RESTRICTIONS FOR REGISTERED SEXUAL OFFENDERS

Raised Bill No. 432, AN ACT PROVIDING NOTICE TO THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER OF A MUNICIPALITY UPON THE RELEASE OF A REGISTERED SEXUAL OFFENDER INTO SUCH MUNICIPALITY.

Good afternoon, Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and members of the Judiciary Committee. I am Eric Ellison, Parole Manager for the Department of Correction. I am here to express the Department's opposition to Raised Bill No. 5449, An Act Concerning Residency Restrictions for Registered Sexual Offenders. I will also comment briefly about Raised Bill No 432, An Act Providing Notice to the Chief Executive of a Municipality Upon the Release of a Registered Sexual Offender into Such Municipality.

The Department of Correction's Parole and Community Services Division employs an evidenced-based multidisciplinary approach to effectively manage registered sex offenders in the community. This approach includes techniques and interventions shown to result in positive outcomes and reduce sexual recidivism. Restricting access to potential minor victims is a critical intervention which reduces the likelihood of future sexual victimization. Parole officers responsible for the supervision of registered sex offenders make decisions to exclude certain registered sex offenders from contact with minors using all available information and input from the division's collaborative partners.

These partners include contracted sex offender treatment providers from The Connection Inc., Center for the Treatment of Problem Sexual Behavior; polygraph examiners; victim advocates from Connecticut Sexual Assault Crisis Services (CONNSACS); state police from the Connecticut State Police Sex Offender Registry Unit; local law enforcement responsible for matters relating to registered sex offenders; Department of Correction institutional sex offender treatment providers; and staff from the Board of Pardons and Paroles.

Parole's sex offender management techniques and other interventions include the use of validated sex offender risk assessments, polygraph examinations, individualized case management plans, offense specific cognitive-behavioral sex offender treatment, and intensive supervision including frequent compliance checks and GPS monitoring, toxicology testing, sex offender registration, victim advocacy, computer monitoring and computer forensic examinations, and surveillance.

The residency restriction provisions in Raised Bill No. 5449 would negatively impact the Department's ability to place and effectively supervise sex offenders on parole because already scarce housing options would be drastically reduced. In reality, future paroled sex offenders

would no longer be able to live in major urban areas, limiting their access to parole offices, sex offender treatment, jobs, and other necessary services. The majority of registered sex offenders currently on parole reside in major urban areas where schools, daycares, and senior centers are concentrated.

Additionally, parole officers would lose the ability to effectively monitor risk factors related to sexual offending due to the certain increase in offender homelessness. Electronic monitoring devices would become difficult, if not impossible, to utilize due to the lack of available power sources necessary to charge monitoring equipment.

Stable housing is a critical factor in the successful reintegration of sex offenders. Housing instability has been shown to increase general and sexual recidivism. The bill's provisions would restrict some paroled sex offenders from residing with supportive family or friends leading to isolation and an increased risk to reoffend. Residency restrictions are not supported by empirical evidence and there appears to be no relationship between proximity and recidivism.

Sex offender registration, as defined by C.G.S. Chapter 969, is based solely on crime of conviction and is not a reliable predictor of risk. This system should not serve as the basis for residency restrictions. Relevant static and dynamic factors, shown to be predictive of sexual recidivism, are absent from the Connecticut sex offender registry.

While the majority of sexual offenses against minors are perpetrated by family, friends, or others known to the victim, a predatory offender intent on reoffending can conceivably access a minor victim anywhere in the community. Studies have shown these offenders actually prefer targeting minor victims in neighborhoods other than their own where they will not be recognized.

If this Raised Bill were to move out of committee, the Department would like to see, prior to any final action, the development of a statewide map identifying the one-thousand foot zones surrounding all public and private elementary schools and every day care service provider in the state. With this tool we could have a meaningful conversation regarding the severe housing restrictions for this population.

Additionally, regarding Raised Bill No. 432, An Act Providing Notice to the Chief Executive of a Municipality Upon The Release of a Registered Sexual Offender into Such Municipality, I would simply like to point out that this information is already transmitted to the local police departments, the State Police and Resident State Troopers through the COLLECT system. This bill appears redundant, as Chief Executives can get this information from law enforcement currently.