

-YALE COLLEGE- DEMOCRATS

Testimony of Jackson Beck
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1035 Chapel Street, Suite C11
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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

I am a current student at Yale University, and I am writing to urge you to pass the juvenile justice reform bill. The Connecticut criminal justice system must stop giving juvenile offenders life sentences without the possibility of parole. In delivering such sentences, the United States stands alone in a world that largely recognizes the special consideration juvenile offenders deserve within the criminal justice system. Failing to pass juvenile justice reform would be unconstitutional and profoundly unfair.

In January, I attended a gathering for friends and family members of men and women serving juvenile life without parole. I heard from former inmates who committed crimes when they were under 18 years old, and I learned how they changed in prison, as well as how they were rebuilding their lives, supporting themselves and their communities. For many juvenile offenders serving long sentences without the possibility of parole, this opportunity to start over is just out of reach. For this reason, it's critical that these juvenile offenders be eligible for a parole hearing after serving a substantial portion of their sentence.

This gathering also shed light on the unique circumstances from which juvenile offenders often emerge. They frequently endure poverty, violence, and peer pressure, and many of them have family members who have served prison sentences themselves. These factors are indicative of larger societal issues that long prison sentences without parole can't possibly solve. Such circumstances further illustrate the importance of second chances.

Again, I urge you to pass this reform as soon as possible. Your leadership can help Connecticut bring greater justice to its criminal justice system.