

TESTIMONY IN SUPPORT OF S.B. 361

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Good afternoon

Chairman Coleman, Chairman Fox, Sen. Doyle, Rep. Ritter, Sen. Kissel, Rep. Rebimbas, Sen. Holder-Winfield and members of the Judiciary Committee:

I am Aileen Keays, Project Manager of the Children with Incarcerated Parents Initiative within the Institute for Municipal & Regional Policy (IMRP) at Central CT State University (CCSU). **I am here to testify in support of Senate Bill [S.B. 361](#) An Act Concerning Family Impact Statements.**

On behalf of the multitude of individuals, families and children we have worked with since the Children with Incarcerated Parents Initiative began, I would like to first thank the CT General Assembly, and in particular the Judiciary Committee, for considering the implications of this particular policy on this vulnerable, yet often overlooked population – the families of persons convicted of a crime.

A recent IMRP report estimates the number of minor children of incarcerated parents (CIP) in Connecticut in 2010 at 21,741ⁱ. There is considerable empirical evidence that a parent or caregiver's incarceration can have negative effects on a child. Research on children of incarcerated parents has shown an increased risk for incarcerationⁱⁱ and psychopathologyⁱⁱⁱ. Researchers meta-analyzed the literature and concluded that parental incarceration is associated with increased risk of antisocial behavior (e.g., drug use; criminal behavior)^{iv}. They also found some evidence of an association with mental health problems^v. It is important to keep in mind that families affected by incarceration also tend to experience a host of challenges such as poverty, loss of social supports, and added strain as a result of the loved one's incarceration.

There are also community-level consequences associated with high incarceration rates. It is currently estimated, based on a continuation of current policies, that 1 in 3 black males born today will experience incarceration in their lifetime. The same is true for 1 in 6 Latino males and 1 in 17 white males. In Connecticut, with its racially disparate cities and towns, these trends do and will continue significantly impact the social fabric of families, neighborhoods and the larger communities. This level of widespread incarceration affects a community's economic stability and public health, as well as its residents' sense of well-being and hope. These potential harms imposed by incarceration can lead to a *decrease* in public safety, contradictory to the incarceration's intent.

As residents, we pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America “with liberty and justice for all”. As esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee, you well know that an effective judicial process achieves actual justice when it holds the person convicted for an offense accountable, and simultaneously safeguards against the potential for unnecessary harm on victims, the convicted individual, the state, communities, families and most certainly children. Yet as Assistant Professor of Sociology at Yale University, Christopher Wildeman, stated in his

report on children with incarcerated parents “Despite almost universal agreement that strong families are a powerful source of social order and public safety, U.S. crime policy has, in the name of public safety, produced more vulnerable families and probably reduced the life chances of their children.”^{vi} He continues to conclude:

“To avoid contradictions like this, policy makers must ask of any proposed reform: what will it do to families? Changes in criminal sentencing over the past thirty years offer a prime example. In at least two areas, punitive sentencing has had substantially negative effects on families. First, the widespread adoption of mandatory minimum prison sentences for drug crimes has incarcerated many men without significant histories of violence. Ironically, the families of these previously nonviolent men appear to have suffered the largest negative effects.”^{vii}

If Connecticut’s interest is to achieve justice while enhancing public safety, than considering the effects of incarceration on individual families and the larger communities wherein they reside is critical. Persons convicted of crime must be held accountable, but the best means for accomplishing that should be determined with a greater understanding of the long-term individual *and collective* collateral consequences of each sentence. Creating a body of family impact statements will help to achieve this goal.

i Children of incarcerated parents: A quantitative evaluation of mentoring and home-based counseling and case management services. New Britain, CT: The Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy.

ii Huebner, B. M., & Gustafson, R. (2007). The effect of maternal incarceration on adult offspring involvement in the criminal justice system. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 35(3), 283-296. doi:10.1016/j.jcrimjus.2007.03.005

iii Murray, J., & Murray, L. (2010). Parental incarceration, attachment, and child psychopathology. *Attachment & Human Development*, 12, 289-309.

iv Murray, J., Farrington, D. P., & Sekol, I. (2012). Children's antisocial behavior, mental health, drug use, and educational performance after parental incarceration: A systematic review and meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, 138, 175-210. doi:10.1037/a0026407

v Children of incarcerated parents: A quantitative evaluation of mentoring and home-based counseling and case management services. New Britain, CT: The Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy.

vi Wildeman, Christopher and Bruce Western. 2010. Incarceration in fragile families. *Future of Children*, 20: 157–177. http://futureofchildren.org/futureofchildren/publications/docs/20_02_08.pdf.

vii Ibid.