



The Church of the Redeemer  
United Church of Christ

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Testimony Supporting  
HB 6834 AN ACT CONCERNING COLLABORATION BETWEEN BOARDS OF EDUCATION AND  
SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS  
and  
HB 6837 AN ACT ENCOURAGING A GRADUATED RESPONSE MODEL FOR STUDENT  
DISCIPLINE

To the Honorable Members of the Education Committee:

I am testifying today as a private citizen concerned with the levels of incarceration in our state and nation today. In 2012, while I was a student at Yale Divinity School, I became aware of our nation's distinction as the highest jailer in the world. Our nation and our state have put in place laws that we have supported over the last 30 years in a misguided effort to make our state and our nation a safer place to live for all of us. But these laws have never been equally applied to all our state's citizens and the fact is that overly harsh treatment of minorities has resulted in their arrest and imprisonment at levels not supported by criminality that exceeds that found in other communities. While my efforts focus mainly on the injustice of our adult criminal justice system, the fact is that our juvenile justice system here in the state of Connecticut is bloated as well and serves as a feeder pool for adult incarceration. Much of this bloat comes from the misuse of school resource officers to achieve discipline that should be handled administratively by school administrations.

The Biennial Report on the Disproportionate Minority Contact for Fiscal year 2010-2011 has finding of bias in the juvenile justice system that results in many more minority students being arrested than their numbers or behavior supports. This report showed that police were 2.4 times as likely to write an incident report for Hispanic youth than white youth and 3.24 times as likely to write an incident report for black youth. And once a student in school has been arrested, a child of color is much more likely to be referred to court for a non-serious felony (98% of the time for black and Hispanic youth versus 82% for white youth) and for a misdemeanor (80% for black youth versus 69% for white youth). These disparities were the subject of a day-long conference that I attended at the University of Maryland entitled, The PreK to Prison Pipeline, making me very aware of the link between over policing in our inner city schools and the resultant mass incarceration of black and brown people in our state and nation.

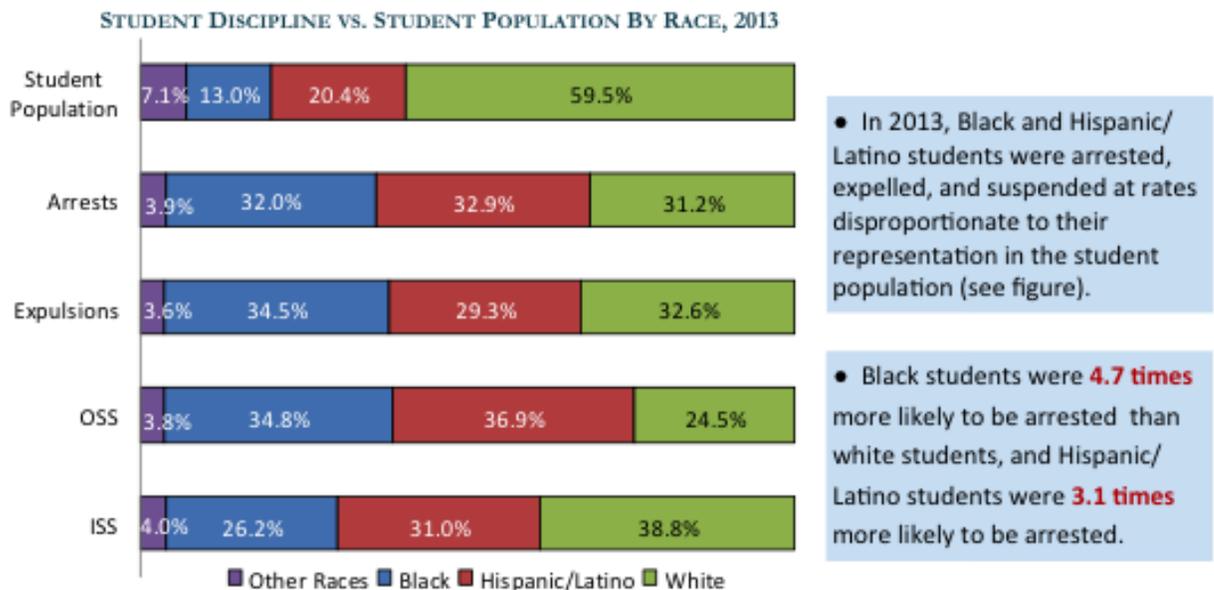
Therefore, I support the passage of both these bills as a first step in turning the tide on Connecticut's incarceration levels, both for adults and for youth.

Some facts to consider: Excluding children from school for disciplinary problems is often ineffective and even counter productive. In many cases, behaviors for which students are disciplined could be prevented through earlier intervention and better access to services, or handled more effectively with school-based sanctions that address the true source of the misbehavior. While Connecticut has made strides in reducing the percentage of students arrested, expelled, and suspended over the last five years, the rates of exclusionary discipline have stayed the same or even INCREASED for

Connecticut’s minority, low-income, and special education students. Connecticut must continue to implement preventative strategies and alternative disciplinary measures that take into account racial and other disparities to ensure that children stay in the classroom.

Some Key Findings:

- Since 2008, the number of students arrested, expelled and suspended in Connecticut has decreased significantly.
- Despite the overall reduction in exclusionary school discipline, too many students are pushed out of school for “school policy violations,” behavior that could be more effectively addressed in the classroom. Arrests of minority students for violations that are not even crimes for adults are resulting in too many black and brown boys being incarcerated in our juvenile justice system.
- Schools continue to arrest, expel, and suspend minority students, special education students and students from poorer districts at rates disproportionate to their representation in the school population.



Source: Connecticut Voices for Children’s Analysis of (SDE) Data

I therefore support the recommendations put forth by Connecticut Voices for Children. I also preach and teach about mass incarceration at churches around the state of Connecticut in an effort to raise awareness about the injustice in our state being perpetrated on the most marginalized members of our society.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Informed by key elements of successful community programs as well as state and national best practices, key action items for the State Legislature, State Department of Education, local districts and schools, and community members and parents include:

**1. Understand the scope of the school discipline problem in order to effectively address it:**

- Clearly define “student arrest.”
- Collect and publish data on student arrests.

**2. Ensure schools, police, and the community work together to keep students in class:**

- Implement memoranda of agreement between schools and police.
- Promote police and educator training.
- Establish and support community collaborates/Local Interagency Service Teams across the state

**3. Implement preventative strategies and alternative disciplinary measures that take into account racial and other disparities and ensure those excluded from school are provided equal opportunities:**

- Conduct ongoing conversations with educators about disciplinary disparities and biases.
- Promote restorative practices and empower students to develop shared behavioral expectations.
- Provide high-quality alternative educational settings and support services for students who must be removed from school.
- Expand and utilize Juvenile Review Boards (JRBs) and ensure access to behavioral and mental health services.

**The full report, including the executive summary, is publicly available at [www.ctvoices.org](http://www.ctvoices.org).**

I am a member of the board of the Malta Justice Initiative and part of the writing committee that wrote the book, *The Justice Imperative: How Hyper Incarceration Has Hijacked the American Dream*.

Thank you for taking time to read my testimony.