

**Department of Correction  
Testimony of Eric Ellison, Deputy Director**

**Judiciary Committee  
March 20, 2015**

**Raised Bill No. 7028, AN ACT CONCERNING THE  
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION, ACCESS TO THE  
FIREARMS DATABASE BY PAROLE OFFICERS, AND  
PRESENTATION OF A CARRY PERMIT.**

Good afternoon, Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, and members of the Judiciary Committee. I am Eric Ellison, Deputy Director for the Division of Parole and Community Services within Department of Correction. I am accompanied by Jennifer Bennett, also a Deputy Director with the Division of Parole and Community Services. I am here to express the Department's support for the intent of Section 23 in Raised Bill No. 7028, An Act Concerning The Department Of Correction, Access To The Firearms Database By Parole Officers, And Presentation Of A Carry Permit. However, the Department respectfully requests the Committee revise the language to better protect Parole Officers and Connecticut residents. This proposed language change to Raised Bill No. 7028 will be discussed in more detail in the body of the testimony.

Parole Officers within the Department of Correction's Parole and Community Services Division supervise approximately 3,800 offenders across the state under the jurisdiction of the Commissioner of Correction and Chair of the Board of Pardons and Paroles. A key element to successfully reintegrate these offenders into the community is their placement in housing with supportive family or friends, also known as "sponsors." The approval process for sponsors includes a criminal background check, pre-release home investigation, and the signing of a sponsor disclosure agreement. The primary focus of this agreement

requires the sponsor to disclose to the Parole Officer if firearms are present in the residence or are introduced at any point during the term of supervision. Parolees are strictly prohibited from possessing firearms in accordance with state statute and their conditions of release. The Division of Parole and Community Services prevents offenders under supervision from residing in residences that contain firearms. Parolee access to firearms is considered a risk to both Parole Officers and Connecticut residents.

Each year, Parole Officers conduct more than 5,000 home investigations in order to place parolees under supervision in the community. When conducting home investigations, Parole Officers must be able to reliably determine whether firearms are actually present in a residence. Currently, Parole Officers must depend solely on sponsors' verbal statements about the presence or absence of firearms. Parole Officers should be authorized access to the firearms database to provide a much more reliable means to verify the accuracy of these statements and to identify potential risks related to the presence of firearms.

Pre-release home investigations are only one aspect of a Parole Officer's duties which require making entrance to a parolee's residence. Over 12,000 home visits are conducted by Parole Officers each year to insure compliance with the conditions of release. These visits are necessary to promote public safety and foster successful parolee re-entry. Access to the firearms database is necessary to better inform Parole Officers about the risks of firearms prior to performing these duties.

Parole Officers are also charged with apprehending parole fugitives who do not use the re-entry opportunities provided to them by the Department. Information about firearms in a suspected fugitive's residence is vital to operational planning to safely take these individuals into custody. Access to the firearms database will provide Parole Officers with this added information.

Both officer and public safety will be greatly enhanced by allowing Department of Correction Parole Officers, acting in the performance of their duties, access to the Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection firearms database. Parole Officers will be able to better determine if registered firearms are present in residences prior to conducting pre-release home investigations, home visits, or fugitive apprehensions.

Current law only allows disclosure of firearms database information to law enforcement officials and U.S. Probation Officers acting in the performance of their duties. Effective October 1, 2012, U.S. Probation Officers were granted access to the database by the legislature under Subsection (d) of section 29-28; Subsection (e) of section 29-36g; and Subsection (a) of section 53-202d. This allows U.S. Probation Officers the same access as law enforcement and that is the same language the Department of Correction is seeking in order to protect our Parole Officers and the community.

The Department considers this approach preferable to the language in Raised Bill No. 7028 which only provides Parole Officers with the same access as “any person, firm or corporation who sells or otherwise transfers firearms.” The Department respectfully requests amending language in Raised Bill No. 7028 to allow Parole Officers the same access as law enforcement and U.S. Probation Officers and that **“authorized Department of Correction Parole Officers within the Division of Parole and Community Services acting in the performance of their official duties to supervise parolees”** be added to Subsection (d) of section 29-28; Subsection (e) of section 29-36g; and Subsection (5) of section 53-202d.

I thank you for the opportunity to address the Committee on this important issue affecting Parole Officers and Connecticut residents and I would be happy to answer any questions you may have.