

Testimony of Val Rossetti in Support of SB 796
Judiciary Committee
March 4, 2015

I am writing in support of efforts to reform juvenile sentencing in the State of CT, specifically in regard to long sentences or life-without-parole sentences for crimes committed by those under 18 (SB-796). It's time that CT law be brought into compliance with the Miller v. Alabama Supreme Court decision. Given that juvenile brains have not yet fully developed, and that actions by juveniles are often impetuous and immature, it makes sense not to accord them adult length sentences. Affording them an opportunity for a parole hearing after 60% of their sentence or 12 years has been served seems just and wise. It allows for maturation to occur, for the processes of remorse and rehabilitation to take place, and provides at least a possibility for that young offender to emerge from prison to a useful life. The proposed law provides only a "second-look", not a "get-out-of-jail-free" card.

I am writing not only as a physician with some knowledge of human neural development. I am also writing as a volunteer of several years in the CT Correctional institutions. I have personally come across inmates who would be afforded an opportunity for parole review under the new law. One young man stands out in my mind. Involved in a capital felony at age 17 in which he did not hold or fire a weapon, he nevertheless has now spent over 18 years in prison. He has publically taken responsibility for his part in the crime, asked forgiveness, and committed himself to becoming a skilled and compassionate medical assistant. His equanimity, skillful restraint, and wise understanding have made him into a role model for many of his fellow inmates.

As a legislator, you also certainly realize that absent an amended sentencing bill, the State of CT will be subject to numerous individual lawsuits from juveniles with lengthy sentences, each of which will require public resources and tax dollars to address. Much better to implement a new standard. In addition, the costs of long term incarceration of those who may ultimately prove to be productive members of society can be saved.

Thank you for your consideration of my views.

Sincerely,

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