



**Connecticut Conference
United Church of Christ**

125 Sherman Street
Hartford, CT 06105-6004

**Testimony in Support of Governor's Bill 952:
An Act Concerning A Second Chance Society
Submitted by: Michele Mudrick, Legislative Advocate
Connecticut Conference, United Church of Christ
March 13, 2015**

Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee,

I am Michele Mudrick, Legislative Advocate for the Connecticut Conference, United Church of Christ, and I am writing today in support of the Governor's Bill No. 952: An Act Concerning A Second Chance Society to implement the Governor's Budget Recommendations.

I am writing on behalf of the 240 congregations and more than 73,000 people in our state's churches. In fact, the United Church of Christ (UCC) is the largest Protestant denomination in Connecticut. Nationally, the UCC has more than 5,700 congregations with nearly 1 million members. In 2014, the assembled delegates and ministers of the Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ met and voted on a Resolution which calls upon the Connecticut Conference to End Mass Incarceration for Non-Violent Offenses. This calls for members of the Conference churches to oppose existing law which currently sends large numbers of people to prison for long sentences as a result of non-violent drug offenses, and to support new legislation which promotes alternatives.

Connecticut's prison population has skyrocketed since the 1980's, for the most part by imprisoning a far greater number of non-violent offenders than it had before. Over 95% of our prisoners are eventually released. On a relative basis, Connecticut's prison population on a per capita basis is higher than those states which are considered models. Other states have been able to reduce the size of their prison populations over the past decade without sacrificing public safety, including New York. Most of the prison beds added by Connecticut over the past thirty years are occupied by offenders convicted of drug charges, public order infractions, or technical parole violations, many of whom do not have a history of or a propensity for violence.¹

Texas is a state that has sought to lessen its prison population. From 1985 to 2005, Texas saw its inmate population triple, leading to the second highest incarceration rate in the United States. In the mid-2000s, Texas chose to invest \$241 million in treatment programs, create specialty drug and prostitution courts and expand probation as an alternative to incarceration. These cost-cutting moves did not come at a price to public safety. In fact, crime rates fell. From 2007 to 2008, Texas saw a 5 percent decline in murders, a 4.3 percent drop in robberies and a 6.8 percent drop in rape. Moreover, the number of parolees convicted of new crimes fell 7.6 percent.²

These results have also been sustained. Since September 2011, Texas has been able to close 3 state prisons. It has quantified the daily savings brought about by utilizing probation (\$3.63 per day) in lieu of incarceration in a maximum security prison (\$50.04 per day).³

¹ The Justice Imperative

² The Justice Imperative

³ The Justice Imperative



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Texas has succeeded by being smart on crime, while it has remained tough on violent crime. In the words of Texas State Senator, John Whitmire, "there ought to be a requirement that you release a better person than the one you received". This sentiment has been echoed in Governor Rick Perry's comment "the idea that we lock people up, throw away forever, never give them a second chance at redemption, isn't what America is about."⁴

All of God's people deserve a Second Chance. The Connecticut Conference of the United Church of Christ supports the Governor's Bill No 952: An Act Concerning a Second Chance Society. Thank you for your work and for the opportunity to supply written testimony in support of the Governor's Bill 952.

Blessings,
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⁴ The Justice Imperative



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