



State of Connecticut

SENATE

SENATOR DANTÉ BARTOLOMEO

Thirteenth District

March 4, 2015

Testimony on House Bill 6926

Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, Ranking Members Kissel and Rebimbas, members of the Judiciary Committee, thank you for taking the time to consider my testimony today regarding HB 6926. My testimony focuses specifically on Section 12 of the bill, which addresses the Risk Reduction Earned Credits program.

This is a subject of great importance to me not only as a State Senator, but also as a resident of the City of Meriden, as a parent, and as someone who cares about the safety of her fellow citizens. I have opposed this program from the beginning and I would like to seize this opportunity to tell you why, as it may be my only opportunity to address the subject this session.

Since my time on the Meriden City Council, I have advocated for the repeal of the Risk Reduction Earned Credits program. Barring a complete repeal, I urge this committee to change the law to exclude all A and B felony offenses from eligibility for risk reduction earned credits. In addition, repeat offenders should be ineligible for such credits. To this end, I have also co-sponsored SB 649, AAC Restriction of the Use of the Earned Risk Reduction Credit Program, which would prohibit all violent felons from being released early under the program.

In June 2012, our community was shattered when local gas station owner Ibrahim Ghazal was shot to death by Frankie Resto, a confirmed gang member who previously had been convicted on a felony charge of first-degree robbery after holding up another individual at knifepoint in Meriden back in 2006.

There is no excuse for continuing to allow individuals who have committed heinous crimes such as these to benefit from this program. We owe it to the families of victims like Mr. Ghazal to make sure we keep our communities safe. After witnessing firsthand the consequences of this program's shortcomings in my community, I firmly believe that all A and B felony offenders should be excluded from eligibility for risk reduction earned credits.

In July of 2012, I became the first public official to call for specific changes to the Risk Reduction Credit program by proposing that individuals convicted of either an A or B felony would be ineligible, as would anyone repeat offenders – those convicted of more than one felony offense. This would add over 30 additional violent crimes to the current list of six excluded from the program.

In spite of the violent nature of the crime for which he was convicted, and despite a demonstrated pattern of engaging in aggressive and insubordinate behavior in prison, Frankie Resto was free to participate in the Risk Reduction Credit program, as his conviction for robbery did not fall under any of the six offenses that are currently excluded.

Even after his propensity for violence led to him being identified as a security risk, Resto still earned 199 days of credit. Rather than being ineligible for the program as a result of his prior acts, he was instead able to earn credits retroactive to the beginning of his sentence in 2006.

Although I am aware that there have been other instances of crimes being committed by individuals subsequent to their participation in the Risk Reduction Credit program, the murder of Mr. Ghazal resonates with me for obvious reasons.

As a State Senator and in my previous role as a Meriden City Councilor, I have given my unconditional support to the widow and children of Mr. Ghazal. The pain they feel and the sense of loss that they must live with every day is obvious, as this senseless killing has deprived them of a loving husband and a father who wanted nothing more than to run a business and support his family.

Given the devastating impact Frankie Resto's early release has had on the community that I live in and represent, the only responsible decision is to enact immediate and decisive changes in the interest of public safety. There are simply too many violent individuals abusing this initiative. Drawing the line at six offenses is not enough to keep our citizens safe when criminals are able to earn credits even after being convicted of felonies including:

- 1st Degree Manslaughter (with and without a firearm)
- 1st Degree Assault
- Assault of a pregnant woman causing termination of that pregnancy
- 1st Degree Sexual assault
- Aggravated sexual assault of a minor
- 1st Degree Rape
- 1st Degree Kidnapping (with and without a firearm)
- 1st Degree Arson
- 1st Degree Robbery and 1st Degree Burglary
- Human Trafficking
- Employing a minor in an obscene performance
- Acts of terrorism

In addition, I also recommended that the Department of Corrections end the practice of awarding credits to inmates who are on the waiting list for Risk Reduction programs but are not currently

enrolled. If an inmate is not actively participating in any of these initiatives, it doesn't make sense to reward them simply for waiting.

On behalf of all of Connecticut's citizens, it is our obligation to help make our communities safer, and I wholeheartedly believe that the restrictions I have proposed to the Earned Risk Reduction Credit program will help accomplish that goal. Thank you again for taking the time to consider my testimony.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dante Bartolomeo". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Danté Bartolomeo
State Senator, 13th District