



330 Main Street, Hartford, Connecticut 06106
860-523-9146 | www.acluct.org

**Written Testimony in Support of House Bill 1127,
An Act Concerning Mandatory Minimum Sentences for Children**

Senator Coleman, Representative Tong and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is David McGuire, I am a staff attorney with the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT) and I am testifying in support of House Bill 1127, An Act Concerning Mandatory Minimum Sentences for Children.

This bill will allow judges the ability to deviate from the prescribed mandatory minimum term when good cause is shown. This amendment would bring our sentencing scheme into line with judicial trends by accounting for major differences between children and adults. In recent years, when considering the constitutionality of several juvenile sentencing schemes, the U.S. Supreme Court has relied on scientific studies about adolescent brain development. The Court has stressed that youth are less culpable for their crimes and more capable of rehabilitation. The Court in *Miller v. Alabama* (2012) held that mandatory life sentences without the possibility of parole for children under the age of 18 at the time of their crime violates the Eighth Amendment's prohibition on cruel and unusual punishment. The Court specifically noted juveniles' "diminished culpability and greater prospects for reform." The Court has made unquestionably clear that children are different than adults and that difference must be reflected in how courts sentence children in adult court.

Criminal laws should allow judges to consider sentences on a case-by-case basis. This bill will restore discretion to judges, when good cause is shown, to impose individualized sentences in cases involving 14 to 18 year olds after considering the specific characteristics of the child and circumstances of the case. Please pass House Bill 1127 and restore judicial discretion in certain cases involving children subjected to mandatory adult sentences.