



STATE OF CONNECTICUT
SENATE
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SENATE REPUBLICAN OFFICES

Chairman Coleman, Chairman Tong, Ranking Members Kissel and Rebimbas, and members of the Judiciary Committee, I am here today on behalf of the Senate Republican Caucus testifying in strong support of SB 1129, ***AN ACT ESTABLISHING A PILOT PROGRAM TO IDENTIFY AND TRACK THE HOMELESS, ADDICTED OR MENTALLY ILL PERSONS ENTERING THE JUSTICE SYSTEM AND CONCERNING THE EARNED RISK REDUCTION CREDIT PROGRAM.***

Section one of this bill is a key component of any urban agenda designed to provide alternatives to simply locking someone up when they might have underlying health and medical conditions that caused them to break the law in the first place, circumstances that would be better handled in alternative means rather than incarcerating the person. The proposed bill would create a pilot program in two very well equipped courts. The program would center on a "gatekeeper" in the prosecutor's office to review arrests and determine if a person is drug addicted, mentally ill, homeless or a veteran in need of assistance. Once the person is identified as needing help in one or more of these categories, they would then be referred to treatment and/or programs to address and solve the underlying problem. Prosecution of the crime would not go forward so long as the person complies with the programs' terms. In far too many cases, underlying conditions are major contributing factors to the cause of the crime, and simply locking a person up does nothing to address the issues or assist the person in finding alternatives to committing future crimes. Mental illness and drug addiction are public health issues, not criminal issues. Homelessness and struggles faced by our veterans can also cause extreme challenges we cannot ignore. Often, people need treatment and help rather than simple punishment. If we can help people heal, recover and get back on their feet, we can give people a reason not to offend in the future. These efforts will go further than any incarceration in reducing crime and increasing public safety.

That being said, we also recognize that sometimes certain crimes are of such a violent nature that the public does need extra protection that only incarceration can provide. Section 2 of this bill addresses that by reforming the Risk Reduction Earned Credit program and adding to the list of violent offenses that a person cannot have their sentence reduced by risk reduction credits. First degree manslaughter, manslaughter with a firearm, aggravated sexual assault of a minor, assault of a pregnant woman resulting in the termination of her pregnancy, and designation as a persistent dangerous felon and persistent dangerous sexual offender are among the most heinous crimes on our books. The fact that those convicted of them can currently get out of prison early is offensive to our sensibilities and could severely threaten public safety. These

crimes are serious, and those who commit them should face the full consequences of their actions, and serve their full sentence. This legislation would make sure that happens.

The second piece of Section 2 is also extremely important in that it adds a certain level of accountability to the risk reduction program. It requires the warden of the correction facility that releases an inmate with consideration of risk reduction credits to review each file, review the credits earned, and sign off on the release. Currently, this level of review is not required in the program. As a result, we have seen multiple cases in which some released inmates who seem not to have been rehabilitated have very quickly reoffended in some horrific manners upon their release. When questions arise as to the released inmate, we need to know who can answer them. This part of the bill will provide much needed safeguards and accountability in the system.

Finally, I wish to thank Chairmen Coleman and Tong for their willingness to address the concerns of so many lawmakers concerning the Risk Reduction Earned Credit program and to work together to find some reasonable approaches to make the system better for everyone. You have been open and honest with our caucus and we look forward to continuing to work on such legislation in the future. Your desire to make reforms a bipartisan effort is a refreshing change in what can all too often be a pitched battle from opposite ends of the political spectrum. Thank you again for allowing this debate and discussion to take place and your openness to all ideas to help better the system.