



NATASHA M. PIERRE, ESQ.
State Victim Advocate

Testimony of Natasha M. Pierre, Esq., State Victim Advocate
Submitted to the Judiciary Committee
Wednesday, April 1, 2015

Good morning Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, Senator Kissel, Representative Rebimbas and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. For the record, my name is Natasha Pierre and I am the Victim Advocate for the State of Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony concerning:

Senate Bill No. 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
House Bill No. 7049, An Act Concerning Pretrial Diversionary Programs

The Office of the Victim Advocate (OVA) understands that certain populations of offenders, such as homeless, addicted or mentally ill persons, may have unique circumstances that led to criminal behavior and that the sensible resolution may be diversion programs to assist the offender in an effort to stabilize such person and prevent further arrests. However, the OVA would like to ensure that crime victims' constitutional and statutory rights are not lost during this diversion process.

Crime victims are entitled to notification of an offender's application for a diversion program and the opportunity to be heard by the court regarding such application. Any policies and procedures created in response to Section 1 of Senate Bill No. 1129 must include victim notification to ensure that crime victims' constitutional rights are upheld throughout the criminal justice process.

Section 2 of Senate Bill No. 1129 proposes to add four specific crimes, manslaughter first degree; manslaughter first degree with a firearm; assault of a pregnant woman; aggravated sexual assault of a minor, to the list of crimes that, upon conviction, are ineligible to earn risk reduction credits. Additionally, any inmate convicted as a persistent dangerous felony offender or persistent dangerous sexual offender would also be ineligible to earn risk reduction credits. The OVA supports this proposal and strongly encourages the Committee's favorable action.

Section 4 of House Bill No. 7049 would allow an individual with psychiatric disabilities or a veteran to participate in a supervised diversionary program even if charged with a family violence crime and they are eligible for the pretrial family violence education program. While the OVA agrees that the supervised diversionary program may be better equipped to address the varying needs of persons with psychiatric disabilities and veterans, it should not be overlooked that the offender committed an act of family violence.

Family violence diversion programs focus on offender accountability and behavior change. Although during the assessment process, it is helpful to understand whether a family violence offender has problems with substance use or addiction, the substance use is not an excuse for committing an act of family violence. In response to having this information, the offender would be referred for additional services to address the substance use or abuse. Likewise, if an offender expressed mental health challenges during the assessment, the offender would receive a referral for mental health services, in conjunction with the family violence intervention program.

Therefore, the OVA strongly recommends that the Committee consider an additional amendment to the proposal that would ensure that any individual placed in the supervised diversionary program as a result of a family violence arrest be required to participate in family violence education, in addition to any other treatment and services.

Thank you for consideration of my testimony.

Respectfully submitted,



Natasha M. Pierre, Esq.
State Victim Advocate