



**PA 19-131**—sSB 1098

*Judiciary Committee*

**AN ACT CONCERNING THE TESTIMONY OF JAILHOUSE WITNESSES**

**SUMMARY:** This act allows a criminal defendant, by filing a written request with the court, to ask the prosecutor if he or she intends to introduce the testimony of a jailhouse witness in the prosecution.

Under the act, the prosecutor must respond promptly but no later than 45 days after the defendant files the motion. If the prosecutor plans to introduce such testimony, he or she must provide certain specified information and materials related to the witness's testimony within that period. The prosecutor may request, and the court may grant, an extension under certain circumstances. If the court finds that the requested disclosure may result in possible bodily harm to the witness, the court may order that the information and materials be viewed only by defense counsel, and not by the defendant or other parties.

The act also requires the court, upon the motion of a defendant facing prosecution for murder or certain other serious felony offenses, to conduct a hearing to decide whether a jailhouse witness's testimony is reliable and admissible. The act specifies the information and materials the court must consider when determining the witness's reliability. (PA 19-132 modifies the definition of jailhouse witness and makes other changes to this act.)

Additionally, the act requires each state's attorney's office to track certain information related to its use of jailhouse witnesses and send the information to the Office of Policy and Management's (OPM) Criminal Justice Policy and Planning Division, which must maintain a statewide record of the materials. The information is confidential and not subject to disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act.

EFFECTIVE DATE: October 1, 2019

**JAILHOUSE WITNESS DISCLOSURE**

*Definition*

Under the act, a "jailhouse witness" is a person who is incarcerated when he or she offers to provide testimony concerning statements a defendant or suspected perpetrator made. (PA 19-132, § 6, modifies the definition to instead include (1) a person who offers or provides testimony about statements another inmate made to him or her while they were both incarcerated or (2) an inmate who offers or provides testimony about statements made to him or her by a person suspected of, or charged with, committing a crime.)

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### *Information and Materials*

Under the act, if a prosecutor plans to introduce testimony from a jailhouse witness, he or she must provide the defendant the following information and materials in response to the defendant's written request:

1. the witness's complete criminal history, including any charges that are pending or were reduced or dismissed as part of a plea bargain;
2. the witness's cooperation agreement with the prosecutor and any benefit the prosecutor provided, offered, or may offer the witness in the future;
3. the substance, time, and place of any statement the (a) defendant allegedly gave the witness and (b) witness gave implicating the defendant in an offense for which the defendant was indicted;
4. whether the witness recanted, at any time, any testimony subject to the disclosure and, if so, the time, place, and nature of the recantation and name of anyone present when the witness recanted; and
5. information about any other criminal prosecution in which the witness testified or offered to testify against a suspected perpetrator or defendant with whom the witness was imprisoned or otherwise confined, including any cooperation agreement with a prosecutor or any benefit the prosecutor provided or offered the witness.

### *Benefits*

The act defines "benefit" as a plea bargain, bail consideration, sentence modification or reduction, or any other leniency, immunity, financial payment, reward, or amelioration of current or future incarceration conditions offered or provided in connection with, or in exchange for, testimony that a jailhouse witness offers or provides.

### *Extension to Gather Information and Materials*

The act permits the prosecutor to move for an extension of time to make the required disclosure; the court may grant the extension if it finds that the (1) prosecutor did not know about the witness when the defendant filed the request and (2) information the prosecutor must disclose could not be disclosed by exercising due diligence within the required period. The court may grant a reasonable extension upon good cause shown or allow the requested extension on its own motion.

### HEARING ON WITNESS RELIABILITY

The act also requires the court to conduct a hearing to decide whether a jailhouse witness's testimony is reliable and admissible upon the motion of a defendant facing prosecution for one of the following offenses:

1. murder (CGS § 53a-54a),
2. murder with special circumstances (CGS § 53a-54b),

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3. felony murder (CGS § 53a-54c),
4. arson murder (CGS § 53a-54d),
5. 1<sup>st</sup> degree sexual assault (CGS § 53a-70),
6. aggravated 1<sup>st</sup> degree sexual assault (CGS § 53a-70a), or
7. aggravated sexual assault of a minor (CGS § 53a-70c).

The defendant must file the motion before the trial for the alleged offense begins. (PA 19-132, § 7, makes hearsay and secondary evidence admissible at these hearings.)

In determining the witness's reliability, the court must consider the information and materials related to the witness that the prosecutor disclosed to the defendant and the following factors:

1. extent to which the witness's testimony is confirmed by other evidence;
2. testimony's specificity;
3. extent to which the testimony contains details known only by the alleged perpetrator;
4. extent to which the testimony's details could be obtained from a source other than the defendant; and
5. circumstances under which the witness initially provided information supporting the testimony to a sworn municipal or state police officer or prosecutor, including whether the witness was responding to a leading question.

(PA 19-132 allows, instead of requires, the court to consider these factors when determining the testimony's reliability and additionally requires the court to evaluate the evidence submitted at the hearing when making this determination.)

The act prohibits the court from allowing the witness's testimony to be admitted if the prosecutor fails to show by a preponderance of the evidence that the testimony is reliable. (PA 19-132, § 7, instead prohibits the testimony's admission if the prosecutor fails to make a prima facie (i.e., plainly sufficient) showing that the testimony is reliable.)

### STATE'S ATTORNEY'S OFFICE REPORTING REQUIREMENT

Under the act, the information each state's attorney's office must track and provide to OPM includes the following:

1. the substance and use of any jailhouse witness's testimony against the interest of a suspected perpetrator or defendant, regardless of whether the testimony is presented at trial, and
2. the witness's agreement to cooperate with the prosecutor and any benefit the prosecutor provided, offered, or may offer in the future to the witness in connection to his or her testimony.