Division of Public Defender Services
State of Connecticut

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TESTIMONY OF CHRISTINE PERRA RAPILLO, CHIEF PUBLIC DEFENDER

RAISED BILL 6548, AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE JURY SELECTION TASK FORCE
JUDICIARY COMMITTEE
March 15, 2021

Mission Statement of the Division of Public Defender Services

Striving to ensure justice and a fair and unbiased system, the Connecticut Division of Public Defender Services zealously promotes and protects the rights, liberty and dignity of all clients entrusted to us. We are committed to holistic representation that recognizes clients as individuals, fosters trust and prevents unnecessary and wrongful convictions.

The Office of Chief Public Defender strongly supports the adoption of ***R. B. 6548, An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Jury Selection Task Force***. These recommendations represent the consensus of a large and diverse group of judges, academics and legal practitioners who participated in the Task Force created by Chief Justice Richard Robinson in follow up to the decision in State v. Holmes, 334 Conn. 202 (2019). As the Chief Public Defender, I represented the Division of Public Defender Services on the Task Force. In addition, several members of our staff served as representatives of racial or ethnic affinity bars or other legal groups.

The right to a fair trial by a jury of one's peers is a fundamental tenet of our criminal legal system. Efforts must be made to improve the diversity of our jury pool to ensure fairness and instill confidence that the system provides justice for everyone. The recommendations in 6548 are thoughtful and practical proposals that should expand access to juror service and increase the number of Black People, Indigenous People and People of Color in Connecticut's jury pools.

The proposals include increasing the daily pay for juror service, expanding the categories of individuals eligible to serve on a jury, and an innovative idea to make sure that unanswered jury notices are resent to individuals from the same zip code. The new recommendations would require that demographic information, including race, be collected on the jury information

forms and that the information be maintained without personally identifiable information. This is critically important to attorneys attempting to seat a diverse jury. Material from the juror information sheets is not currently preserved. Without it, it is impossible for an attorney wishing to challenge the makeup of a jury pool to determine the racial distribution of the potential jurors.

The Office of Chief Public Defender urges this Committee to act favorably on this proposal.