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Testifying in support of
***HB 6669: AN ACT CONCERNING JUVENILES AND MOTOR VEHICLE THEFT,
INVESTIGATIONS OF CERTAIN PENDING JUVENILE MATTERS AND REPORTING
OF REQUESTS TO DETAIN ARRESTED JUVENILES***

Judiciary Committee
March 31, 2021

Chairman Stafstrom and Chairman Winfield, Ranking Members Fishbein and Kissel, and honorable members of the Judiciary Committee:

I am State Representative Gary Turco, and I represent the 27th House district, which comprises most of the Town of Newington. I'm testifying here today in support of **H.B. 6669: An Act Concerning Juveniles and Motor Vehicle Theft, Investigations of Certain Pending Juvenile Matters and Reporting of Requests to Detain Arrested Juveniles.**

Thank you for raising a bill and conducting a public hearing on the critical issue of reducing juvenile crime, specifically in the area of property crimes such as motor vehicle thefts and break-ins. My community of Newington has been plagued by the problem of cars being stolen, broken into, and damaged. These crimes have resulted in thousands in damage, the loss of people's personal property, and many residents living in constant emotional angst and fear of additional crimes.

These crimes have affected all parts of the community, such as large condo complexes, where recently up to 100 cars were broken in to on a single night, and quiet residential streets. Residents have woken up to their windows being smashed, tires stolen, or have gone inside while the car was warming up on a cold winter day to find it taken from the driveway moments later. Many times, an individual's car has been broken into because they accidentally left the vehicle unlocked. However, it is an accident that should not result in one's personal property being violated.

Although data shows that these crimes are a national problem and had been decreasing in Connecticut until the start of the pandemic in March of 2020, I believe we have a responsibility as a state government to try and enact policies that will help mitigate the issue.

From the conversations I have had with law enforcement, the Judicial Branch, juvenile justice advocates, and community organizations, I have learned that our state is currently failing high-risk youth in numerous areas. The foundation of these failures begins with the socioeconomic inequalities found throughout the state, especially within our urban centers. Many of these youth have started life with insurmountable difficulties from the lack of proper funding for schools and community programs, and unstable housing and living situations. These inequalities have been made worse from the Covid-19 pandemic.

The state also made decisions to treat youth who commit these crimes as children rather than try them in adult courts and not send them to adult prisons. The state chose to close secure facilities like the Connecticut Juvenile Training School. While I support both initiatives and do not want to see a reversal of the "raise the age" policies, the state never properly shifted funding with these changes to support community programs adequately.

I have also learned that from the time of an arrest of a youth for the crime of vehicle theft, there can be a 30-day or more delay until the case is adjudicated. In that time, the youth is not being provided necessary rehabilitative services, is not being held properly accountable, and may be a safety risk to themselves and the public. Also, the Covid-19 pandemic delayed the implementation of some diversionary programs that were put in place in response to 2019 legislation to help reduce vehicle theft crimes. I fear they may not have adequate funding and resources to reduce repeat incidents dramatically.

There are numerous reasons why these car thefts and break-in crimes are being committed, and at least half of the arrests are from adults and not juveniles. However, I believe it is our responsibility as a state to help prevent harm to these children's futures that may result from these continued crimes being committed.

This proposed bill helps address several concerns within my community and is similar to suggestions from law enforcement. Section 1 will help to hold adults more accountable who are possibly soliciting or coercing youth into committing these types of crimes. Section 3 will help ensure that repeat offenders are properly monitored with a GPS device until their case is adjudicated and they can be held accountable for the crime, and rehabilitative services can be provided. The other sections of the bill are also crucial in supporting efforts to ensure proper accountability of crimes when a deadly weapon is used, and to protect the youth and the child from harming them self and others.

There are other areas I ask the committee to consider adding to this bill to increase the effectiveness of its goals. The suggestions include:

- Providing more tools and resources to law enforcement to aid in patrols and arrest of these property theft crimes
- Ensuring proper accountability for the crimes committed by youth through a restorative justice program
- Creating a state-wide PSA about locking cars and securing valuables within
- Adding funding for more community services and additional diversionary programs, especially for high-risk youth
- Reducing the time from the arrest of youth to adjudication of the case in juvenile court

Thank you again for raising this bill and giving it a public hearing. I urge its passage out of this committee and any improvements the committee sees fit from the suggestions received at this public hearing.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gary Turco". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Gary Turco
State Representative
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