Dear Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Senator Kissel, Representative Fishbein and members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Christina Quaranta and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Justice Alliance (CTJA). CTJA is a youth/adult partnership, advocacy and public policy organization dedicated to ending the criminalization of Connecticut’s youth. I am testifying in support of Senate Bill No. 952, which will give individuals serving lengthy sentences for crimes committed before the individual reached the age of twenty-five an opportunity to be heard by the Board of Pardons and Paroles.

The Connecticut Justice Alliance works with youth who are impacted by the criminal legal system. Our experiences with this population demonstrate that youth have diminished culpability and have great capacity for change and growth. We strive to ensure that these youth receive fair and dignified treatment within the criminal legal system; I strongly believe that fair and dignified treatment for youth convicted of crimes before the age of twenty-five must include parole eligibility.

Research on adolescent brain development has shown that adolescent brains develop through the age of 25, and lengthy incarceration stifles young people’s capacity for growth and maturation. The U.S. Department of Justice’s National Institute of Justice found that “young adult offenders ages 18-24 are more similar to juveniles than to adults.”¹ Unlike adulthood, young adulthood is characterized by a lack of impulse control and emotional regulation.² Connecticut has already recognized these and other implications of emerging adult brain science. For example, in 2022, the Board of Pardons and Paroles commuted the sentences of eleven individuals who committed crimes before they were twenty-five years old.³ In their commutation decisions, the Board referenced adolescent brain development studies that show that human brains are not fully developed until individuals’ late twenties. The passage of S.B. 952 will allow the Board to consider, on an individual basis, the sentences of people who committed their crimes before turning twenty-five and, in appropriate cases, return to their loved ones.

I can see how this science plays out in practice in CTJA’s programming. For example, our Justice Advisors are a group of young people aged 18 through 25 who have first or second-hand experience with the justice system; these experiences have pushed them to reengage with their communities, working to improve the conditions that land youth into the justice system. Through their advocacy, they amplif the voices of youth and children in their communities, demonstrating that system-impacted youth can play vital roles in servin their communities. Our commitment to youth demands that we work at every opportunity to ensure that those convicted of crimes before the age of twenty-five have a meaningful opportunity to demonstrate their growth and return to their communities through parole eligibility.

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¹From Juvenile Delinquency to Young Adult Offender, National Institute of Justice (2014), available at: https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/ juvenile-delinquency-young-adult-offending.
³Kelan Lyons, Parole Board Shortens Sentences of 11 Men Who Committed Crimes When They Were Young, C.T. MIRROR (Jan. 21, 2022), 5:00 AM, https://ctmirror.org/2022/01/21/parole-board-shortens-sentences-of-11-men-who-committed-crimes-when-they-were-young/.
This bill could also help reduce the racial disparities in Connecticut’s prisons. In Connecticut, Black youth are 13.5 times more likely than white youth to be incarcerated; Connecticut has the second highest Black/white racial disparity in youth incarceration in the country.\(^4\) Expanding parole eligibility would allow people convicted of crimes when they were young adults to be individually considered for release by the Board of Pardons and Paroles. The state of Connecticut has already made significant investments in implicit bias training and similar programs, and these individualized assessments would be a continuation of Connecticut’s effort to reduce racial disparities in Connecticut prisons. Additionally, extending parole eligibility to people who are incarcerated for crimes that they committed as young adults would allow the state to capitalize on the success of its successful young adult rehabilitative programming, including the nationally renowned TRUE program at Cheshire Correctional Institution and the WORTH Unit at York Correctional Institution.\(^5\)

Other jurisdictions have implemented similar bills, including California and the District of Columbia.\(^6\) Early outcomes from both jurisdictions show that there is little risk to public safety. The California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation reported that out of 346 people released between August 2016 and July 2017, only two people, or 0.6% of those released, have been reconvicted within two years of their release.\(^7\) Out of 445 people released between August 2017 and July 2018, only two, or 0.4% of those released, were reconvicted within a year of their release.\(^8\) The statute passed in D.C., the Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act of 2016 (IRAA), resulted in 49 people being provided with parole hearings and ultimately led to 41 people being released and eight people being denied release.\(^9\) Reports in 2020 showed a 0% recidivism rate for individuals released under the statute.\(^10\) Furthermore, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, approximately 90% of individuals released under the provisions of IRAA were employed.\(^11\) SB952 is consistent with other jurisdictions’ successful reforms.

There is broad support for this bill. Seventy percent of surveyed crime victims preferred criminal legal systems that held people accountable through different options beyond just prison.\(^12\) Additionally, 82 percent of Connecticut residents believe that youth in prisons should be rehabilitated.\(^13\) Connecticut residents strongly back a youth criminal justice system that focuses on prevention and rehabilitation over punishment and incarceration.\(^14\) Rehabilitation and second chances are especially important for

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\(^6\)A.B. 1308 (Cal. 2017); D.C. ST § 24-403.03(a)(1) (2019).


\(^8\)Id.

\(^9\)Id.

\(^10\)Id.


\(^12\)Young People and CT’s Adult Carceral System, Connecticut Justice Alliance (n.d.), available at: https://static1.squarespace.com/static/6001e98f39fd1e2db6708c4/t/63dc3e338333310ce9e29179/1675378318402/YoungPeople+%26+CT%27s+ACS.pdf.

\(^13\)Id.
people under the age of twenty-five because those emerging adults are particularly amenable to rehabilitation.

In short, if enacted, this bill will enable the Board of Pardons and Paroles to review applications from people who are incarcerated for crimes they committed before the age of twenty-five. This legislation would allow individualized considerations by the Board and would be life-changing for rehabilitated persons who deserve a chance to demonstrate their growth. For the reasons stated above, we believe risks to public safety would be minimal. This bill is consistent with Connecticut residents’ support of second chances for people who enter prison as young people, and it would reduce racial disparities in Connecticut prisons. We urge you to vote to pass S.B. 952. Thank you for your consideration.

Christina Quaranta
Executive Director
CT Justice Alliance

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