

PRISON POLICY INITIATIVE

Testimony in Support of SB 503

Sarah Staudt, Director of Policy and Advocacy, Prison Policy Initiative

March 17, 2026

My name is Sarah Staudt, and I am the Director of Policy and Advocacy at Prison Policy Initiative. Prison Policy Initiative is a national non-profit research and advocacy organization that has produced extensive research on the various individual and public harms of incarceration.

Extending parole eligibility to more people aligns with established neuroscience and understandings of culpability

Although there is no bright-line age at which someone's brain finishes developing, neuroscience shows that our brains continue to develop well into our early 20s¹. This means that people between 21 and 26 years old are still affected by the impulsiveness, sensitivity to emotion, and lack of forward thinking and planning that characterizes younger adults. Logically, this means two things: first, that people who lack the full adult capacity to control their actions are not as culpable as those who have that capacity, and second, that people who committed crimes when their brains are not fully developed are less likely to continue to commit crimes after their brains have grown and changed.

These factors are exactly the things that parole boards are designed to assess and reward. By allowing more people access to the opportunity to make their case for release, Connecticut promotes fundamental fairness. Nothing about the parole process provides a guarantee of release – to the contrary, only 51% of people in Connecticut with parole hearings were paroled in 2024². The parole board would retain the ability to assess rehabilitation and public safety risk before

¹ “White Paper on the Science of Late Adolescence: A Guide for Judges, Attorneys, and Policy Makers”, Center for Law Brain and Behavior, Massachusetts General Hospital, 2022, available at: <https://clbb.mgh.harvard.edu/white-paper-on-the-science-of-late-adolescence/>

² Wang, Leah, “Parole in Perspective: A Deep Dive into Discretionary Parole Systems”, Prison Policy Initiative, October 2025, available at https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/parole_appendix2_grantrates.html

making the decision to parole an individual. This bill does not give a guarantee of release, only a fair chance.

Extending parole eligibility to more people promotes public safety

Long sentences disproportionately affect Black and Latinx people. The population of people serving 10 or more years in prison in Connecticut is 47% Black and 29% Latinx³. In comparison, Connecticut's population as a whole is 13% Black and 19% Latinx⁴.

Long sentences remove hope from people in prison, leaving them little incentive or opportunity to improve their lives and contribute to society. As of 2019, 57% of people nationwide were serving sentences of 10 or more years, and as of 2020, one in seven people was serving a life sentence. Despite these high numbers, there is little evidence that long sentences do anything to deter crime. Study after study has shown that people do not avoid criminal behavior because of the harshness of sentences but because of the perceived likelihood of being caught and facing *any* sentence⁵. Long sentences cannot be justified on crime prevention grounds.

Recidivism rates for people released under similar laws to SB 503 have been low. California enacted a similar law to SB 503 in 2013 (expanding its scope in 2015 and 2017). Like SB 503, the law provides parole eligibility to people under 26 after they have served a specified number of years. Only 0.6% of people released under this law were reconvicted of a crime within two years, compared to 35% of overall releases⁶.

Extending parole eligibility to more people saves Connecticut money

Paroling more people also decreases costs for the state. It costs almost \$60,000 to incarcerate a person in Connecticut for a year⁷. Costs increase substantially as people in prison get older. California recently released data showing that it cost almost twice as much to incarcerate a person who was over 50 than someone who was under 30, and over 4 times as much to incarcerate someone over 70 than someone under 30⁸. Given the incredibly small chances of recidivism for the population who would become eligible for parole under this section, Connecticut is likely to see major cost savings overall.

³ Connecticut Department of Corrections Demographics Dashboard, available at <https://link.prisonpolicy.org/A7SLQW>

⁴ QuickFacts: Connecticut, US Census, available at <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/CT/PST045224>

⁵ Nelson, Marta, Feineh, Samuel, Mapolski Maris, "A New Paradigm for Sentencing in the United States" Vera Institute of Justice, February 2023, available at <https://vera-institute.files.svcdcdn.com/production/downloads/publications/Vera-Sentencing-Report-2023.pdf?dm=1676058378>

⁶ Behr, Natalie, "Emerging Adult Justice Project, "Specialized Parole and Resentencing Laws Focused on Emerging Adults", September 2020, available at <https://link.prisonpolicy.org/xqB1hy>.

⁷ Derdarian, Jeff, "News 8 Special Report: What is the cost of Connecticut prisons for taxpayers?", November 25, 2025, available at: <https://www.wtnh.com/news/connecticut/what-is-the-cost-of-connecticut-prisons-for-taxpayers/>

⁸ "Alternatives to Incarceration for Individuals who are Advanced in Age, Disabled, or Have Significant Needs", California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, March 2026, available at: <https://cchcs.ca.gov/wp-content/uploads/sites/60/CDCR-SB-108-Report-Alternatives-to-Incarceration-March-2026-ADA-Compliant.pdf>

For these reasons we urge the committee to support SB 503.