

Good afternoon Senator Coleman, Representative Fox and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is David McGuire. As the Staff Attorney for the ACLU of Connecticut, I submit this testimony in support of Raised Bill No. 6391, An Act Concerning Penalties for Certain Driving Under the Influence Offenses, Offender Risk Reduction Earned Credits and Home Confinement for Certain Nonviolent Drug Offenders.

A lack of discharge options and the inability to reduce the length of prison sentences through earned credits or good time credits have contributed to costly prison overcrowding without increasing public safety. This bill provides opportunities for offenders to develop skills to succeed in society and a means to earn credits towards earlier release, thereby reducing recidivism rates.

Earned time programs that incorporate vocational training, education opportunities and rehabilitation help reduce crime by better preparing offenders for reentry into Connecticut towns and cities. This bill will promote offender rehabilitation by fostering good behavior, better decision making, and participation in programs.

At least 31 other states provide earned time or good time benefits to offenders, through either meritorious claims or completion of various types of programs.^[1] A National Conference of State Legislatures report on the outcomes of “accelerated release” in thirteen states found “no significant increase in rates of recidivism for those offenders who reduced their length of incarceration. A few studies instead found a decrease in recidivism rates.”^[2]

The availability of good time credits based on the merits of an offender’s actions make the prison environment safe for other offenders and correction officers. Additionally, good time credits are an effective management tool for correction officials.

The Connecticut prison population has significantly increased since good time was abolished in 1994. A significant portion of Connecticut’s budget goes towards paying for years’ worth of excessive incarceration for rehabilitated offenders without increasing public safety-this practice does not make sense in this harsh economic climate. This bill will also help the state avoid costly and time-consuming prison overcrowding litigation.

Incarceration is more expensive and often less effective than alternative programs. Home confinement for some non-violent offenders will save money and reduce prison overcrowding. Many non-violent offenders do not belong in prison with violent offenders.

The reforms in this bill will help reduce Connecticut's significant fiscal problems by reducing prison overcrowding and will increase public safety by reducing prisoner recidivism and diverting resources to crime prevention rather than warehousing prisoners. The ACLU-CT urges this committee to pass Raised Bill 6391.