



Legislative Testimony
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**Written Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 1327, An Act Concerning the
Reduction of a Sentence by the Sentencing Court or a Judge**

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Ranking Members Kissel and Fishbein,
and members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Jess Zaccagnino, and I am the policy counsel of the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am writing to testify in supporting Senate Bill 1327, An Act Concerning the Reduction of a Sentence by the Sentencing Court or a Judge.

The ACLU-CT is committed to ending mass incarceration and racism in policing in all forms. We cannot jail our way into real public safety. Increasing incarceration in the United States for more than two decades did not reduce violent crime.¹ The United States is a global outlier when it comes to the frequency of imposing life imprisonment or decades-long incarceration on its population.² Lengthy prison sentences do not make our communities safer nor do they reduce recidivism rates. Among the most vulnerable people who become enmeshed in the criminal legal system with lengthy sentences are young people under the age of eighteen, especially Black children and children of color, who suffer unique harms due to their involvement in the criminal legal system and are more likely to experience even wider racial disparities than exist for adults.³

¹ Oliver Roeder, *What Caused the Crime Decline?*, BRENNAN CTR. JUST. (2015), https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2566965.

² Dirk van Zyl Smit & Catherine Appleton, *LIFE IMPRISONMENT: A GLOBAL HUMAN RIGHTS ANALYSIS* (2009).

³ Colette Marcellin & Samantha Harvell, *Data Snapshot of Youth Incarceration in Connecticut*, URBAN INST. (May 2020), https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/102176/data-snapshot-of-youth-incarceration-in-connecticut_1.pdf.

Connecticut is not an exception to racial disparities in mass incarceration. In Connecticut, 7 percent of the prison and jail population is currently serving a life sentence.⁴ While Black people account for 13 percent of Connecticut's population, they account for 54 percent of people serving life sentences.⁵ People of color in general account for 71 percent of life without parole sentences in Connecticut. This is simply unacceptable. In fact, it was this disproportionate imposition of severe prison sentences on Black people and people of color that caused the National Academies of Sciences to recommend second-look provisions for long sentences to mitigate racial disparities in incarceration.⁶ The majority of people serving life sentences in our state were young adults when they first became entangled in our criminal legal system. About 52 percent of these young adults were under 25 years old when the offense was committed. Connecticut is also one of merely four states where a majority of people serving life sentences are elderly, a population that is highly unlikely to recidivate. This is the result of “tough on crime” policies: extreme, disproportionate, and racially discriminatory sentences that keep people in prison for decades, even when people are at a low risk of recidivism.

The ACLU-CT believes in a society where all people, including those who have been convicted of a crime, have equal opportunity to contribute to society and build successful and fulfilling lives. Second look sentence modification reforms, like Senate Bill 1327, are essential to reducing extreme and disproportionate lengthy prison sentences. Since 2014, the U.S. Congress and at least nine states have adopted second look sentencing, and more than twenty states are considering second look legislation.⁷ Senate Bill 1327 will expand our existing “second look” process by fixing a number of unnecessary restrictions currently in our sentence modification law. The bill would

⁴ See Ashley Nellis & Celeste Barry, *A Matter of Life: The Scope and Impact of Life and Long-Term Imprisonment in the United States*, SENTENCING PROJ. (2025), <https://www.sentencingproject.org/app/uploads/2025/01/A-Matter-of-Life-The-Scope-and-Impact-of-Life-and-Long-Term-Imprisonment-in-the-United-States.pdf>.

⁵ *Data on Connecticut's Race and Ethnic Composition Represents 2023 Estimates*, U.S. Census Bureau (2023), <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/CT/PST045223>.

⁶ K.G. Muhammad, et al., *Reducing Racial Inequality in Crime and Justice: Science, Practice, and Policy* (2022), <https://nap.nationalacademies.org/catalog/26705/reducing-racial-inequality-in-crime-and-justice-science-practice-and>.

⁷ See, e.g., *The Connecticut Second Look Sentencing Project* (accessed Mar. 14, 2025), <https://www.ct2ndlook.org/>.

allow people who are serving mandatory minimum sentences prior to petition for modification and remove the requirement that the state's attorney consent to a modification hearing in certain plea deal cases. Senate Bill 1327 also requires the court to either docket a hearing or reject the application on technical grounds within 90 days, to decide a case within 30 days of a hearing, and to provide the decision to the defendant within 45 days of a hearing, and to state the reasons for the decision. If an application is rejected on technical grounds, like missing information or a signature, the bill would allow an amended application to be filed upon notice of rejection. If the application is denied in full, the bill would allow a person to file a subsequent application two years from five years. If the application is denied in part, then an applicant would be able to file a subsequent application after two years rather than three years. If enacted, Senate Bill 1327 will fix our statutes to provide a path to reduced sentences for people serving long sentences, who are disproportionately Black elders and elders of color. As such, the ACLU-CT supports Senate Bill 1327 and urges this Committee to do the same.