



Legislative Testimony
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**Written Testimony Supporting House Joint Resolution 34, a Resolution
Concerning Certain Witchcraft Convictions in Colonial Connecticut**

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

My name is Jess Zaccagnino, and I am the policy counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am writing to testify in support of House Joint Resolution 34, a Resolution Concerning Certain Witchcraft Convictions in Colonial Connecticut.

Alice Young of Windsor was 47 years old when she was convicted of the crime of witchcraft and hanged in Hartford, becoming the first recorded person in the American colonies to be executed for the “crime.”¹ In 2017, the Windsor Town Council exonerated Alice, 370 years after her death.² Connecticut held 43 witchcraft trials, resulting in the execution of sixteen innocent people in the mid-1600s.³ Many of the people targeted as witches were poor, women, and often single mothers.⁴ Those who were not executed by the state were often exiled or faced other forms of abuse. The informal legal proceedings that decided these people’s fates do not meet today’s modern standards of proof, and were much more influenced by fear and moral panic rather than actual law.

¹ Sarajane Sullivan, *Connecticut’s Witch Trials: Three Stories to Know*, COURANT (Oct. 27, 2021), <https://www.ctinsider.com/living/article/Connecticut-s-witch-trials-Three-stories-to-know-16568143.php>.

² *Id.*

³ Chris Pagliuco, *Connecticut’s Witch Trials*, WETHERSFIELD HISTORICAL SOCIETY (accessed Feb. 28, 2023), <https://www.wethersfieldhistory.org/articles/connecticuts-witch-trials/>.

⁴ *Id.*

House Joint Resolution 34 touches on many issues that the ACLU-CT deeply believes in, primarily gender justice, and ending harsh criminal legal policies that result in mass incarceration. If passed, this resolution would be a meaningful symbolic way for the state to acknowledge the grave harms it facilitated by slandering and executing women and men. There are, many generations later, residents who are the descendants of both the victims and perpetrators of the witchcraft trials, who deserve closure. As such, the ACLU-CT supports HJ 34, and urges this Committee to do the same.