



Legislative Testimony  
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**Written Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 952, An Act Concerning Parole Eligibility for an Individual Serving a Lengthy Sentence for a Crime Committed Before the Individual Reached the Age of Twenty-Five**

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 Senate Bill 952, An Act Concerning Parole Eligibility for an Individual Serving a Lengthy Sentence for a Crime Committed Before the Individual Reached the Age of Twenty-Five.

The ACLU-CT is committed to ending mass incarceration in Connecticut and the systemically racist disparities inherent to it. Among the more cruel and unjust aspects of the system of mass incarceration is the criminalization of children and young people. Connecticut has recognized that the criminal legal system should hold people under eighteen less culpable for their choices, seen in past legislation that creates shorter parole opportunities for young people who received lengthy sentences for crimes committed when they were under eighteen.<sup>1</sup> That previous legislation was a good step, but there is further to go. Science clearly indicates that eighteen is not a magic dividing line between young people and adults. If Public Act 15-84 gave earlier parole opportunities because they are less culpable than adults in the criminal legal system—as the legislative history indicates<sup>2</sup>—then it only makes sense to follow that judgment to its true conclusion. That conclusion means that people who were

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Conn. P.A. 15-84 (2015), available at <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2015/ACT/PA/2015PA-00084-R00SB00796-PA.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> See, e.g., Conn. S.B. 796, Judiciary Committee Joint Favorable Report (Mar. 27, 2015), <https://www.cga.ct.gov/2015/JFR/S/2015SB-00796-R00JUD-JFR.html/>.

convicted of crimes committed when they were under age twenty-five should receive the same earlier parole opportunities as other younger people, in recognition of the fact that leaving adolescence happens on a spectrum.

Making this change is also important for racial justice. Black and Latinx young people are incarcerated at rates disproportionate to their overall proportion of Connecticut's population.<sup>3</sup> These disparities are worse for young people.<sup>4</sup> Thus, if people who were convicted for offenses committed when they were under 25 are given parole opportunities, this will have an outsized benefit for Black and Latinx people in Connecticut's prisons. This is thus an important step toward eliminating racial disparities in incarceration. Finally, this bill aligns with the values of Connecticut residents. People in this state believe in second chances and know that people who can get the right kind of help can turn their lives around.<sup>5</sup> This bill gives opportunities to people who have done just that—moved towards rehabilitation and reinvention while incarcerated, despite many obstacles. Providing people convicted when they were younger with opportunities for parole reflects Connecticut residents' firm belief in redemption. For these reasons, the ACLU-CT supports Senate Bill 952. We support this bill, and urge this Committee to support this bill.

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<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., Lisa Backus, *New Data: Finds Black and Hispanic Residents Are Disproportionately Impacted*, CT NEWS JUNKIE (July 16, 2020),

[https://ctnewsjunkie.com/2020/07/16/20200716\\_new\\_data\\_finds\\_black\\_and\\_hispanic\\_residents\\_are\\_disproportionately/](https://ctnewsjunkie.com/2020/07/16/20200716_new_data_finds_black_and_hispanic_residents_are_disproportionately/).

<sup>4</sup> See Colette Marcellin & Samantha Harvell, *Data Snapshot of Youth Incarceration in Connecticut: 2020 Update*, URBAN INST. (May 2020), [https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/102176/data-snapshot-of-youth-incarceration-inconnecticut\\_1.pdf](https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/102176/data-snapshot-of-youth-incarceration-inconnecticut_1.pdf).

<sup>5</sup> See *Smart Justice Poll Regarding Connecticut Voters' Attitudes Toward Clean Slate Proposals*, ACLU-CT (Feb. 19, 2020), <https://www.acluct.org/en/publications/smart-justice-poll-regardingconnecticut-voters-attitudes-toward-clean-slate-proposals>.