



Legislative Testimony
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**Written Testimony Supporting House Bill 6888, An Act Concerning
Juvenile Justice**

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 Bill 6888, An Act Concerning Juvenile Justice.

The ACLU-CT is committed to ending mass incarceration, eliminating racial disparities in the criminal legal system, and reducing harms to justice-impacted people. This includes addressing the root reasons why people come into contact with the criminal legal system in the first place and ensuring that people who do come into contact with the criminal legal system get the help and support that they need. In order for Connecticut to end mass incarceration, this legislature must support bills House Bill 6888.

Among the most vulnerable people who become enmeshed in the criminal legal system are young people under the age of eighteen, 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.¹

¹ Colette Marcellin & Samantha Harvell, *Data Snapshot of Youth Incarceration in Connecticut*, URBAN INST. (May 2020), available at https://www.urban.org/sites/default/files/publication/102176/data-snapshot-of-youth-incarceration-in-connecticut_1.pdf.

While Connecticut has made important improvements in reducing the number of young people who are incarcerated, it has concurrently worsened racial and ethnic disparities.² In 2015, 79 percent of young people who were incarcerated were kids of color, but in 2019, the proportion rose to 84 percent.³ Young people who are incarcerated experience widespread sexual abuse,⁴ worsened mental health outcomes, greater risk of self-harm, significant and often permanent interruption of education, and long-term damage to employment—with little to no corresponding improvement in community safety.⁵

With these unique harms and disparities in mind, the ACLU-CT supports House Bill 6888, which creates a plan to remove pre-trial children from the Department of Corrections. Connecticut is second to Florida in the number of children held in adult prisons, and these children are disproportionately Black and brown.⁶ We currently incarcerate forty-one children in adult prisons—while more than half of states do not incarcerate a single child in adult prison.⁷ When children are incarcerated pre-trial, they are more likely to recidivate: children who enter the adult system are more than 30 percent likely to be re-arrested after returning to their community.⁸ We believe that no child should be held in adult prisons, and as such, encourage this Committee to pass House Bill 6888.

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ Caitlin Curley, *Youth Incarceration in Our Juvenile Justice System May Do More Harm Than Good*, GENBIZ, (Oct. 12, 2016), available at <https://genbiz.com/youth-incarceration-juvenile-justice-system-may-harm-good>.

⁵ Barry Holman & Jason Ziedenberg, *The Dangers of Detention: The Impact of Incarcerating Youth in Detention and Other Secure Facilities*, JUST. POL'Y INST. (Nov. 2006), available at <https://justicepolicy.org/research/the-dangers-of-detention-the-impact-of-incarcerating-youth-in-detention-and-other-secure-facilities/>.

⁶ Ann E. Carson, *Prisoners in 2021- Statistical Tables*, U.S. DEP'T JUST., BUREAU JUST. STAT., 30-31 (2022), <https://bjs.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xvckuh236/files/media/document/p21st.pdf>.

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ See Act for Juvenile Justice (accessed Mar. 15, 2023), <https://www.act4jj.org/sites/default/files/ckfinder/files/ACT4JJ%20Youth%20In%20Adult%20System%20Fact%20Sheet%20Aug%202014%20FINAL.pdf>.