



TESTIMONY BY KEITH WALLINGTON

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House Bill 5306

Connecticut General Assembly

Joint Committee on Judiciary

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Hello Co-Chair Winfield, Co-Chair Staffstrom, Vice Chair Flexer, Vice Chair Gadkar-Wilcox, Vice Chair Fazzino, and distinguished members of the Committee. My name is Keith Wallington, and I am a Senior Campaign Strategist with The Sentencing Project, a national research and advocacy organization dedicated to advancing effective, equitable, and evidence-based criminal justice policies. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of HB 5306, *An Act Concerning Sentence Reduction or Relief for Survivors of Domestic Violence, Sexual Assault, Stalking or Human Trafficking*.

HB 5306 represents a measured and pragmatic reform that strengthens Connecticut's sentencing framework by promoting accountability, enhancing public safety, and addressing longstanding inequities. HB 5306 also reflects a growing national consensus recognizing that sentencing systems must incorporate mechanisms that balance accountability with fairness, proportionality, and an understanding of the effects of trauma.

Connecticut Context and the Need for Review Mechanisms

Connecticut, like many states, continues to grapple with the consequences of lengthy sentencing practices. While incarceration plays a legitimate role in promoting safety and accountability, research consistently demonstrates that the public safety benefits of imprisonment diminish over time.¹ After extended periods, continued incarceration often produces limited safety returns while imposing substantial fiscal and human costs.

Second look and sentence review mechanisms, such as those authorized under HB 5306, provide a structured and judicious process to assess whether continued incarceration remains necessary based on present-day circumstances rather than static historical factors.

National Trend and Bipartisan Momentum

Connecticut's consideration of HB 5306 aligns with a growing national consensus seen in states as varied as Oklahoma, Georgia, Illinois, and New York, all of which have moved toward recognizing the intersection of victimization and sentencing through second look or sentence review reforms.² These policies reflect a pragmatic shift toward ensuring that sentencing systems remain both fair and effective over time. Importantly, this trend underscores that sentence review mechanisms are increasingly understood as public-safety-consistent reforms rather than ideological measures.

Accountability and Acknowledgment of Harm

HB 5306 does not diminish accountability. Rather, it strengthens the integrity of the sentencing process by acknowledging that victimization and criminal legal system involvement are often deeply interconnected.

Survivors of domestic violence, sexual assault, stalking, and human trafficking frequently experience trauma that can shape behavior in profound ways.³ Allowing courts to consider these contextual factors through a structured review process promotes proportionality while preserving full judicial discretion. Crucially, HB 5306 does not mandate sentence reduction or release, and the legislation preserves judicial authority and individualized review. The bill simply authorizes courts to evaluate cases under carefully defined criteria, a safeguard that is both balanced and responsible.

Public Safety Considerations

Extensive evidence from jurisdictions implementing second look and sentencing review reforms demonstrates that these policies do not compromise public safety.⁴ Structured judicial review mechanisms require consideration of institutional conduct, demonstrated rehabilitation, and safety factors. By relying on individualized assessments rather than categorical rules, sentence review processes enhance public safety decision-making while reinforcing public confidence in the justice system.

Mitigating Racial Disparities

Connecticut's criminal legal system exhibits persistent racial disparities, particularly in the imposition of lengthy sentences. National data compiled by The Sentencing Project show that in Connecticut, Black people are incarcerated at rates far higher than their share of the state population — roughly 9.4 times the rate for white residents, and Latino residents are incarcerated at roughly 3.7 times the rate for white residents.⁵ Prison Policy Initiative data also show that while Black people make up about 13% of the state's population, they account for approximately 44% of the incarcerated population.⁶

Second look mechanisms are among the few policy tools capable of directly addressing disparities embedded in past sentencing decisions. By authorizing judicial review, HB 5306

creates opportunities to mitigate inequities while maintaining accountability and judicial oversight.

Crime Survivor Leadership and Support

Crime survivors across the country, including survivors of domestic violence, have been among the strongest advocates for second look and sentence review reforms.^{^7} Survivor-led organizations increasingly emphasize that accountability, healing, and safety are not achieved solely through extended incarceration. HB 5306 reflects this evolving understanding by balancing recognition of harm with opportunities for individualized review grounded in fairness and proportionality.

Fiscal Responsibility and Resource Allocation

Lengthy incarceration imposes significant costs on Connecticut taxpayers. Sentence review mechanisms allow the state to ensure that correctional resources are allocated effectively and strategically. Savings generated through reduced unnecessary incarceration can be reinvested into victim services, violence prevention strategies, community-based supports, and reentry programming, investments that are demonstrably associated with stronger public safety outcomes.^{^8}

HB 5306 represents a measured, evidence-based reform that advances accountability, promotes equity, and strengthens public safety. It provides courts with a structured and responsible mechanism to ensure that sentencing decisions remain justifiable over time. It also brings Connecticut in line with similar efforts happening around the country.

The Sentencing Project urges the Committee to join a growing coalition of state lawmakers supporting second chances by voting favorably on HB 5306.

Footnotes

1. *Rethinking Long Sentences: The Second Look Movement – The Sentencing Project*, <https://www.sentencingproject.org/rethinking-long-sentences-the-second-look-movement/> (*The Sentencing Project*)
2. *Rethinking Long Sentences: The Second Look Movement – The Sentencing Project*, <https://www.sentencingproject.org/rethinking-long-sentences-the-second-look-movement/> (*The Sentencing Project*)
3. *Rethinking Long Sentences: The Second Look Movement – The Sentencing Project*, <https://www.sentencingproject.org/rethinking-long-sentences-the-second-look-movement/> (*The Sentencing Project*)
4. *Rethinking Long Sentences: The Second Look Movement – The Sentencing Project*, <https://www.sentencingproject.org/rethinking-long-sentences-the-second-look-movement/> (*The Sentencing Project*)

5. *U.S. Criminal Justice Data – The Sentencing Project*,
<https://www.sentencingproject.org/research/us-criminal-justice-data/> ([The Sentencing Project](#))
6. *Where people in prison come from: The geography of mass incarceration in Connecticut*, Prison Policy Initiative, <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/origin/ct/2020/report.html> ([Prison Policy Initiative](#))
7. *Rethinking Long Sentences: The Second Look Movement – The Sentencing Project*,
<https://www.sentencingproject.org/rethinking-long-sentences-the-second-look-movement/> ([The Sentencing Project](#))
8. *Rethinking Long Sentences: The Second Look Movement – The Sentencing Project*,
<https://www.sentencingproject.org/rethinking-long-sentences-the-second-look-movement/> ([The Sentencing Project](#))