

# Appropriations Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

**Bill No:** HB-5423 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

**Title:** AN ACT CONCERNING JUVENILE JUSTICE INITIATIVES.

**Vote Date:**

**Vote Action:**

**PH Date:** 3/12/2026

**File No.:**

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## **SPONSORS OF BILL:**

The Appropriations Committee

## **REASONS FOR BILL:**

In an effort to expand community support services in the juvenile justice system, this bill will require a report from the Court Support Services Division's (CSSD) executive director regarding the expansion of community support services.

## **RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:**

Christina Ghio, Acting Child Advocate, Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) – Acting Child Advocate Ghio submitted testimony in support of the bill and urged lawmakers to strengthen it by incorporating additional recommendations. She advocates for a pilot program providing free public transit passes to high school students in select districts to improve safety and reduce chronic absenteeism, emphasizing that transportation barriers contribute to missed school and negative outcomes for youth. She also recommends removing outdated truancy language from statutes, noting that absenteeism is now addressed through supportive, non-punitive systems focused on underlying needs like mental health or housing instability. Additionally, she calls for expanding early parole eligibility for individuals who committed crimes as young adults, arguing that current restrictions create inequities and fail to reflect research on brain development and rehabilitation. Overall, she stresses the importance of policies that address root causes, promote fairness, and better support youth in the justice system.

## **NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:**

Skakur Collins, Community Coordinator, Quinnipiac University – Mr. Collins offered testimony in support of the bill and shares his personal experiences. He describes how he was incarcerated at 18 and spent over two decades in prison before benefiting from expanded juvenile parole eligibility in 2023. He explains that the opportunity for release motivated him to transform his life, leading him to become a college student at Wesleyan University and work to help others access education and reenter society successfully. Collins emphasizes that his story is not unique, noting that many incarcerated individuals have also changed but remain imprisoned due to arbitrary legal limits that fail to recognize their growth. He argues that allowing rehabilitated individuals to return home benefits both them and their communities and urges lawmakers to reform the system to acknowledge personal transformation and provide more people the chance to contribute positively to society.

Lisa McKenna, Director of Mediation Services, Catalyst CT – Ms. McKenna offered testimony in support of the bill and emphasizes that community-based services such as mediation, mentoring, and mental health support are more effective than punitive approaches in preventing youth from deeper involvement in the justice system. She explains that these programs reduce recidivism, keep young people connected to their families and schools, and address underlying issues while being more cost-effective than detention. McKenna argues that expanding these services through the Court Support Services Division would improve outcomes and strengthen public safety by building community trust and support networks. She urges lawmakers not only to require the proposed study but also to prioritize funding and expansion of these proven programs, particularly in underserved areas. Donald Marc offered same testimony below:

Donald Marc, CEO, Catalyst CT

Elizabeth Hinton, Professor, Yale University – Ms. Hinton submitted testimony in support of the bill. She explains that previous fiscal estimates underestimate savings by ignoring major expenses like healthcare and long-term incarceration costs, noting that the true annual cost per incarcerated person is much higher than commonly reported. By allowing earlier parole for eligible individuals, she estimates the state could save tens to hundreds of millions of dollars over time, especially as aging incarcerated populations become more expensive to maintain. Hinton also emphasizes that releasing rehabilitated individuals benefits the economy by allowing them to work and contribute as taxpayers, concluding that the policy is both a sound justice reform and a fiscally responsible decision.

Senecal C. McBride, Public Policy Team, Greater Hartford Gives Foundation - Senecal submitted testimony in support of the bill and urges lawmakers to adopt recommendations from the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee aimed at improving outcomes for youth, particularly by addressing transportation barriers and reducing chronic absenteeism. The foundation emphasizes that lack of access to transportation significantly limits students' ability to attend school, jobs, and training programs, and supports a pilot program to provide free public transit passes to high school students to improve attendance and opportunity. Senecal also calls for a comprehensive review of truancy policies to better address absenteeism through supportive, community-based approaches rather than punitive measures. Drawing on its work with schools and community organizations, the foundation highlights the importance of coordinated services, family engagement, and access to education, healthcare, and job training in preventing youth from becoming disconnected or involved in the justice system. It stresses that investing in these supports not only benefits

individual youth but also strengthens the economy and communities statewide, urging a comprehensive, collaborative response to meet the needs of vulnerable young people.

Emily Knox, Research - Policy Director, Connecticut Voices for Children – Ms. Knox offered testimony in support of the bill and urges lawmakers to incorporate evidence-based recommendations to further improve juvenile justice outcomes. The organization highlights the importance of addressing transportation barriers by providing free public transit passes to high school students, noting that lack of access contributes to chronic absenteeism and increased risk of justice system involvement. It also supports removing outdated “truancy” language from state law, arguing that absenteeism should be treated as a sign of unmet needs rather than punished. Additionally, it advocates expanding parole eligibility for emerging adults, emphasizing research on brain development and the need to align policy with science and practices in other states. Overall, the group stresses that these reforms would promote equity, reduce barriers to opportunity, and better support youth and families.

Adrian Peeler, Community Outreach Coordinator, Coalition for Communal Healing Through Justice Reform – Mr. Peeler offered testimony in support of the bill. Drawing on letters from people incarcerated since their youth, he highlights their personal transformation, education, job skills, and readiness to contribute to society. He emphasizes the high cost of continued incarceration compared to the economic and social benefits of reentry, including workforce participation, reduced recidivism, stronger families, and community stability. Peeler contends that the bill represents an investment in human potential and public safety, urging lawmakers to recognize the value of giving reformed individuals a chance to return and contribute.

Nancy Peters, Organizer, Brothers and Sisters United – Ms. Peters submitted testimony in support of the bill and argues that it would correct arbitrary restrictions and reflect understanding of youth development. She emphasizes that the bill would not guarantee release but allow more people to be considered for parole, potentially saving significant taxpayer money by reducing incarceration costs, especially as individuals age and require more medical care. Peters highlights the personal transformation of many incarcerated individuals and argues that releasing those who are no longer a threat benefits society through workforce participation and community contributions. She also contends that long-term public safety depends on investing in social supports like education, housing, and healthcare rather than continued reliance on incarceration.

Lisa Simone, Director, ACES Youth Justice – Ms. Simone offered testimony in support of the bill, particularly the proposal to remove the 2005 cutoff for parole eligibility and to develop a plan expanding protections for emerging adults up to age 26. Drawing on her experience in education and juvenile diversion, she argues that brain development continues into the mid-twenties, making it critical for policies to reflect young people’s capacity for growth and rehabilitation. She explains that current laws create unfair barriers that prevent individuals from being considered for second chances and emphasizes that education, mentorship, and supportive interventions are more effective than punitive approaches. Simone contends that the bill would align policy with research, promote fairness, and improve outcomes for individuals and communities.

Derrell Soulds – Mr. Soulds supports the bill and shares that his early mistakes were influenced by a lack of guidance and that he only gained the ability to fully weigh consequences in his mid- to late twenties. He highlights examples of peers who committed

serious offenses in their youth but became productive, law-abiding adults. Soulds argues that young people are less likely to reoffend after serving time and can contribute positively to their communities, while releasing them sooner would save the state money that could be redirected to reentry programs. He emphasizes fairness and the importance of giving individuals the opportunity to rebuild their lives once their brain development and judgment have matured.

Scott Totten submitted testimony in support of the bill and believes that youthful mistakes should not result in long-term incarceration, as extended imprisonment is likely counterproductive.

Maryjane Vitello supports the bill and emphasizes that it offers a fair chance for those who made youthful mistakes to demonstrate they have changed, without guaranteeing release.

Tracie Bernardi Guzman, Founder, CEO, Reentry Solutions CT – Ms. Guzman offered testimony in support of the bill and emphasizes that brain development continues until around age 26, so young adults who committed crimes should have a fair, structured second look at parole, not automatic release. Drawing from her own experience of being sentenced at 19 and imprisoned for decades, she highlights the high cost of incarceration and the benefits of allowing people to reenter society, contribute positively, mentor others, and reduce recidivism, arguing that young people can grow beyond their worst mistakes.

Ruby Rivera offered testimony in support of the bill.

Deandre Grim D Brown submitted testimony in support of the bill and shared his experience of being incarcerated and monitored for a crime he committed at 20. He emphasizes that young people often lack legal knowledge and full mental development, making high-pressure decisions that can lead to harsh sentences. The bill would reduce youth incarceration, expand parole and community release opportunities, and invest in counseling, mentorship, and community programs to address root causes, lower recidivism, and help young people rebuild their lives while strengthening communities.

Nicholas Crawford supports the bill. He expresses deep remorse for his actions and emphasizes that one mistake should not define his entire life. During incarceration, he has grown, earned certifications, pursued an associate degree, and developed skills to contribute positively to society. He believes the bill would allow him and others a second chance to rebuild their lives, support their communities, and restore hope to their families.

Linda Cusano submitted testimony in support of the bill. She states that the bill proposes to expand parole eligibility for individuals who committed crimes before age 25, removing the previous cutoff date of October 1, 2005. She emphasizes that the bill does not guarantee release but allows the Board of Pardons and Paroles to consider early release, promoting rehabilitation and recognizing that young offenders can grow and change. Ron Cusano offered same testimony below:

Ron Cusano

Michelle Stella Rose Dugue offered testimony in support of the bill. She states that free public transit for high school students would reduce barriers to attendance, safety risks, and

extracurricular participation. She also states that the truancy language should be removed from statutes to treat chronic absenteeism as a wellbeing issue rather than a criminal matter. She emphasizes that expanding parole eligibility would repeal the October 1, 2005, cutoff, allow review for those who committed offenses under 21, and create protections for emerging adults up to age 26, reflecting brain development research and addressing racial disparities in incarceration. She urges the committee to adopt these recommendations.

Joseph Hendron offered testimony in support of the bill. He emphasizes the importance of second chances for youth, noting that mistakes made in adolescence should not determine a person's entire future. He states that long-term incarceration often institutionalizes rather than rehabilitates individuals, while research shows adolescent brains are still developing in judgment and impulse control. He also states that parole provides an opportunity for those who committed offenses as juveniles to demonstrate growth, accountability, and rehabilitation, showing they can avoid repeating past mistakes.

Heather McLarney supports the bill. She provides a character reference for Derek Humble, describing him as a caring, compassionate, and family-oriented person who has shown maturity through his correspondence. She notes his positive conduct while incarcerated, including pursuing education such as a business degree and participating in programs like K9 training, building on prior skills in plumbing. Based on his growth, determination, and strong support system, she believes he will successfully reintegrate into society and contribute positively to his community if given the opportunity for early release.

Khalid Ibrahim submitted testimony in support of the bill. He describes being inexperienced and poorly represented at trial, receiving a harsher sentence than his co-defendant, and having all appeals denied despite significant personal growth. During his incarceration, he has completed extensive rehabilitation programs, gained vocational skills, earned certifications, and now mentors others in recovery. He argues that he is fully rehabilitated but remains imprisoned due to outdated laws that failed to consider his age and development, and he urges lawmakers to align policy with research on brain development and provide opportunities for release.

Al-Urdun Islam, Community Organizer, The Connecticut Justice Alliance – Mr. Islam submitted testimony in support of the bill. He emphasizes that young people achieve better outcomes when supported in their communities rather than through incarceration, which is more costly and less effective. He advocates for studying and improving court support services by collecting detailed data on usage, costs, providers, and outcomes, and stress that this data should guide real policy changes. He also supports incorporating broader reforms such as expanding transportation access, updating truancy laws to focus on student wellbeing, and aligning parole eligibility with brain development research. Overall, he urges a shift toward prevention, community-based care, and evidence-driven policies to improve outcomes for youth and public safety.

AJ Jackson supports the bill, highlighting its role in improving fairness, public safety, and cost efficiency. He emphasizes removing the October 1, 2005, parole eligibility cutoff, which currently creates unequal treatment for similar offenses, and replacing it with decisions based on rehabilitation and risk rather than arbitrary dates. He states that the bill would also expand eligibility to individuals under 26, reflecting research on youth development. Overall, he

argues that these changes would reduce incarceration costs, support rehabilitation, and create a more equitable and effective justice system without compromising accountability.

James Jeter, Executive Director, Full Citizens Coalition – Mr. Jeter offered testimony supporting the bill. He shares his personal experience of being released under a prior law, emphasizing that the parole process is rigorous and focuses on accountability, rehabilitation, and readiness. He argues that expanding similar opportunities for young people up to age 26 reflects brain development science and leads to positive outcomes, noting that most individuals released under earlier reforms have successfully reintegrated and contribute to their communities. His testimony highlights both fiscal and social benefits, including reduced costs, increased tax contributions, and stronger, safer communities, and urges passage of the bill as an investment in public safety and community growth.

Emme Magliato, Program Coordinator, Yale Prison Education Initiative – Ms. Magliato offered testimony supporting the bill, particularly the expansion of parole eligibility to individuals under 26 and the removal of the October 1, 2005, cutoff, which she argues unfairly excludes many people. Drawing on her work in prison education, she emphasizes that brain development continues into the mid-twenties and that incarcerated individuals demonstrate significant growth through education and rehabilitation programs. She cites evidence that those released under earlier reforms have low recidivism and contribute positively to society, arguing the bill would provide a meaningful opportunity for rehabilitation rather than guaranteed release and represents an important step toward a more just system.

Shaniquia Mclachlan offered testimony supporting the bill. Similar testimony below:

Colivea Acquaye

Jeneva Acquaye

Anonymous 253

Shanta Perry submitted testimony supporting the bill. She emphasizes that it offers a chance for individuals to demonstrate rehabilitation rather than guaranteeing release. She highlights her own transformation through education, work, and programs, and argues that many incarcerated people take responsibility and grow over time. She also criticizes the commutation process as unfairly dismissive without hearing personal progress, and urges recognition that people can change, seeking opportunities for redemption and a chance to prove they are more than their past mistakes.

Sukhmani Singh, Assistant Professor, University of Connecticut – Mr. Singh supports the bill, arguing that policy should align with neuroscience showing brain development continues until about age 26. He advocates removing the October 1, 2005 cutoff and expanding parole eligibility, citing very low recidivism rates among those released under prior reforms. He also highlights the high financial cost of long-term incarceration, estimating hundreds of millions in potential savings, and emphasizes that many incarcerated individuals have faced poverty, trauma, and systemic inequities. He argues that expanding parole eligibility would both improve public safety and allow rehabilitated individuals to contribute positively to society, while urging broader investments in social supports like education, housing, and healthcare.

Deivone Tanksley Sr, Founder – Community Leader, New Britain Legacies Corporation – Mr. Tanksley offered testimony supporting the bill. He emphasizes that many youths are pushed into the justice system, unmet basic needs like transportation, family instability, and trauma rather than intentional wrongdoing. Drawing from his own experience being labeled truant and incarcerated as a child, he argues that systems often misinterpret these challenges instead of addressing them. He supports replacing the term “truancy” with “chronic absenteeism” to shift the focus toward understanding root causes, as well as expanding protections for young people up to age 26 in recognition of ongoing brain development and the impact of environment. Overall, he reforms would create more supportive systems that help youth grow and succeed instead of trapping them in cycles of punishment.

Svetlana Baidak, Vice President, We Got This – Ms. Baidak offered testimony in support of the bill arguing that it reflects scientific evidence on brain development and gives more people a fair chance at parole without guaranteeing release. Drawing on her experience as a mental health professional and as the spouse of an incarcerated person, she emphasizes that people can change with proper support and that older incarcerated individuals pose low public safety risk while costing the state significantly more to house. She believes the bill would promote fairness, reduce costs, and allow resources to be redirected toward community services, rehabilitation, and victim support.

Maurice Blackwell, Director of Community Outreach, Justice for Everybody Movement – Mr. Blackwell submitted testimony in support of the bill, sharing his personal experience of being incarcerated as a young person and later gaining release through a law that allowed parole eligibility for those under 21 sentenced before 2005. He explains how that opportunity transformed his life, enabling him to pursue education, give back to his community, and build a meaningful future. He highlights that many others who were similar in age at the time of their offenses were excluded from this opportunity due to cutoff dates, despite also having grown and rehabilitated themselves. Emphasizing that young people continue to mature into their mid-twenties, he supports the bill to extend fair chances for parole review, allowing more individuals to prove their growth and contribute positively to society.

Melissa Ebron supports of the bill expanding early parole eligibility and second-look reviews, sharing her husband Bryant’s story. He has been incarcerated since age 21 and is now 43, missing major life moments including marriage and becoming a grandfather. She emphasizes that he has grown and changed over more than two decades, noting that brain development continues into the mid-twenties and that he is no longer the same person he was when incarcerated. She argues the legislation would not guarantee release but would allow people like Bryant a fair opportunity to demonstrate their rehabilitation, giving families hope for reunification and a second chance.

Albert Gonzalez offered testimony in support of the bill. He describes how he has transformed over ten years in prison. Through education, vocational training, mentorship, and volunteer work, he has grown into a responsible, accountable, and purpose-driven individual. He emphasizes his personal growth, including becoming a husband, and seeks the opportunity for parole as a demonstration of rehabilitation and the potential for a positive life outside prison.

Mary Valdovinos, Reentry Professional, Reentry Solutions CT – Ms. Valdovinos supports the bill, arguing that young people in the justice system often face trauma and lack the resources

needed to succeed, and that community-based services like mentoring, education, and behavioral health support are key to breaking that cycle. Drawing on both professional and personal experience, she emphasizes that investing in these supports leads to better outcomes than punishment alone. She also highlights the importance of collecting data on these services to improve effectiveness and ensure resources are used wisely, ultimately helping youth grow, avoid deeper system involvement, and build stronger communities.

Andrew Zhebrak, Project Coordinator, Tow Youth Justice Institute, University of New Haven – Mr. Zhebrak support the bills. He argues that truancy labels are unnecessary and stigmatizing since schools already address absenteeism through supportive systems, and that transportation barriers significantly impact attendance. He believes updating these policies and testing free transit for students would improve school engagement and reduce justice system involvement.

Annabelle Campbell offered testimony in support of the bill arguing it improves fairness, public safety, and cost efficiency by removing an arbitrary 2005 sentencing cutoff that currently creates unequal parole eligibility. She states that the bill would allow more individuals who committed crimes as youth to be considered for parole—without guaranteeing release—while still ensuring thorough review. She also states that the bill expands eligibility up to age 26, reflecting research on development, and is expected to reduce recidivism and lower incarceration costs by allowing rehabilitated individuals a chance to reintegrate.

Anonymous 230 supports the bill, emphasizing that young people sentenced as youth can grow and change. They state that the bill would expand early parole eligibility and remove the 2005 sentencing cutoff, allowing individuals to be reviewed based on their rehabilitation and readiness for reintegration. They also state that the bill does not guarantee release but promotes public safety, reduces incarceration costs, and offers hope to affected families.

Anonymous 235 offered testimony supporting the bill and supports removing the October 1, 2005 cutoff in SB 952 so all individuals who committed offenses as juveniles have equal parole eligibility at 60% of their sentence. The current date creates an arbitrary distinction that is unfair, as similar cases face different timelines. They state that juveniles have the capacity for growth and rehabilitation, and parole review should reflect their development rather than an administrative date. Removing the carve-out ensures fairness, consistency, and equal treatment for all affected individuals.

Anonymous 236 offered testimony in support of the bill, states that the bill because it fixes an unfair rule that requires some people who committed crimes as juveniles to serve more of their sentence before becoming eligible for parole based only on when they were sentenced. They argue that giving everyone the same eligibility timeline is fairer, reflects young people's ability to change, and can also reduce incarceration costs by avoiding unnecessarily long prison stays.

Anonymous 237 submitted testimony in support of the bill and criticizes the October 1, 2005 cutoff as an arbitrary rule that unfairly forces some individuals to wait longer for parole eligibility than others in similar situations. The writer argues that removing this date would not affect public safety or guarantee release but would simply allow equal access to parole review and make the system fairer.



Anonymous 238 supports the bill but criticizes it for only proposing further study instead of immediately fixing the unfair October 1, 2005 cutoff, which causes unequal parole eligibility for similar cases. They argue the date is arbitrary, delays justice for affected individuals, and leads to unnecessary incarceration costs without improving public safety. The writer urges lawmakers to act now by removing the cutoff and allowing equal access to parole review rather than delaying reform through additional reports.

Anonymous 239 offered testimony in support of the bill and supports expanding rehabilitative services for people incarcerated at a young age, emphasizing that early support and skill-building can help them successfully reintegrate into society. They argue that individuals under 25 are still developing and deserve compassion, second chances, and the opportunity to become productive members of their communities.

Anonymous 240 submitted testimony in support of the bill, arguing that earlier reforms did not go far enough and excluded many young people who were still developing when they committed their offenses. They emphasize that the bill would give more individuals a fair chance at parole—not guaranteed release—and urge its passage to better reflect the realities of youth development.

Anonymous 245 offered testimony in support of the bill, emphasizing that brain development continues until around age 26 and that young people deserve a second chance. She argues the bill would fairly expand parole eligibility, remove the 2005 cutoff, and allow individuals to be evaluated based on their growth and rehabilitation rather than past mistakes. She highlights the emotional impact on families and believes the bill would promote fairness, healing, and hope while avoiding unnecessarily long incarceration.

Anonymous 247 supports the bill, arguing that young people who commit crimes are capable of growth and rehabilitation and should have the opportunity to demonstrate that progress through parole review. They also emphasize that focusing on rehabilitation can reduce unnecessary incarceration and make the system more fiscally responsible.

#### **NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:**

None Expressed

**Reported by: Matthew Domejczyk**

**Date: 4/2/2026**