

Good afternoon Members of the Judiciary Committee,

My Name is Amy Stegall and I reside in Stafford Connecticut. I am here today as a law abiding citizen, as someone who was horrified at the recent tragedy in Cheshire, and as a person who lost a neighbor and dear friend many years ago to a violent crime. My friend Harriet Foote was murdered during a burglary; she was stabbed to death by a man who broke into her home to steal ten dollars and a tv. So you can see this issue is very important to me.

I have read the various proposals being put forth, and I would like to make special note of some particular items: information sharing, mandatory sentencing, and self defense.

Proposal # 4 would create an internet database for outstanding warrants for parole violations. I would argue that this does not go far enough, that the database should be expanded to ALL outstanding warrants, making them searchable by the public, much like our current online sex offender registry. Other states already do this, and it would be an asset to our police force.

Proposals # 8 & 14 concern the use of deadly force in defense of self and premises. I strongly agree with these proposals. Its time Connecticut started recognizing that citizens should have the right to defend themselves. I recently saw a quote to this effect "life or death decisions are made in a fraction of a second: and the police are only minutes away". This could not be more true.

Proposal # 7 extends mandatory sentencing, and one section addresses a firearm related crime: specifically the theft of a firearm. I would propose that mandatory sentencing be instituted for all violent crimes where a firearm or other weapon is used. Connecticut is notorious for persecuting law abiding gun owners while at the same time allowing criminals who violate gun laws to go without punishment. An OLR report dated July 20, 2007 reflects the following statistics:

For charges of use of a firearm to commit a class A, B, or C felony:

In 2005, 19 charges: all 19 were nolle

In 2006 44 charges: 35 nolle and 2 were plea bargained

In 2007 (up to the point of this report) 13 charges: 11 were nolle and 2 were plea bargained.  
(as noted in the report, a "nolle" is a case where the prosecutor declined to prosecute that particular charge)

I am tired of seeing items like the following which just appeared a few days ago in the Journal Inquirer: "EAST HARTFORD - A 20-year-old was sentenced to four years of **probation** Tuesday after pleading guilty to charges that he pointed a gun at his neighbor during an argument over a car. **Charges of criminal possession of a weapon, stealing a firearm, possession of a sawed-off shotgun, and second-degree breach of peace were not prosecuted.**"

In closing, I would also like to state that I believe violent crime is a symptom and not the disease. Legislators are currently looking at the middle of the problem. You need to work to address the root causes of crime: poverty, drug addiction, illiteracy and other woes. Hard work also needs to be put into reducing recidivism rates by creating better programs for those coming out of the prison system and back into the community. Merely expanding sentencing guidelines does not fix our broken judicial system, or effectively treat violent crime.

In summary: Support the right of citizens to defend themselves, enforce laws already on the books, start making more information available to the public, create programs which prevent crime at its source, and quit allowing violent offenders to walk away unpunished.

Thank you for your consideration of these issues.

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