

Good Afternoon: I want to thank the members of the Judiciary Committee for, once again, allowing members of the community to come before you with testimony relative to the parole ban and any new changes since they are and will likely disproportionately and negatively impact our lives. My name is Barbara Fair and I have been here many times in the past, is here today and will be continue to be here until I begin to see policy changes that will ignite a decrease in our reliance on incarcerating people as job security. I am here as a member of People Against Injustice , a grassroots organization based in New Haven that seeks criminal justice and prison reform. I also come as a parent, an aunt and a cousin of incarcerated individuals and as one who simply cannot sit by and watch the consistent deterioration of families and communities. I once read a quote by the late Robert F Kennedy. He said that "Each time someone stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope. I sit here today with a self imposed duty to stand up and send a tiny ripple of hope to thousands of individuals who have served their time, have been made eligible for parole and yet remain behind bars due to a knee jerk reaction to the horrific acts of violence of two. I also sit here in awe of how quickly legislation is proposed and scheduled for passage (within less than six months within a special session scheduled expressly for that purpose). While children in New Haven, Hartford and Bridgeport were dying on the streets on a daily basis it took several years just to pass legislation that will slap the wrists of those providing the flow of guns into our communities and while children from those same cities were being ushered into the adult system it took several years to pass legislation to return them to the system where they should have been in the first place; although that won't even occur until 2010 and while we as citizens came before this same committee and asked for citizen oversight over prisons because we have been aware for several years that human beings were being degraded and dehumanized in deplorable conditions this committee felt that current oversight was suffice. I am here today because I continue to hope that legislators of conscience will recognize that prisons no longer serve the purpose of correcting behavior and serve solely as warehouses for a certain segment of our society. Our families are viewed as commodities for the prison industrial complex. The complex has become a money maker and job security at the expense of the sick, the uneducated, unskilled and poor in our society. The parole ban has caused individuals who had previously been deemed eligible for parole to remain in prison beyond the promised release date, and returned some who were employed and reunited with their families and could have spent Thanksgiving with their families. It's so grossly unfair that thousands of prisoners and their families have to pay the painful price for the unspeakable acts of two individuals who,( had there been any real justice and equality within the system) would have been incarcerated for a much longer than 3 years. Most of those whom I live around spend 3 years and more in prison for a non violent drug offense. Connecticut prisons are overflowing with Black and Latino drug law violators. White males are LESS likely to spend time in prison in Connecticut than the national average while Black males are MORE likely to spend time in prison than the national average. Why is that? Legislators are responsible for a legal system that allows the kind of disparity in arrest, charging, sentencing and parole decision making that we have in Connecticut. It's time to reverse the tides of injustice in this state so that ALL its citizens can enjoy the pursuit of happiness. Rethink the ban and the proposed changes!!!