



M. JODI RELL
GOVERNOR

STATE OF CONNECTICUT
EXECUTIVE CHAMBERS

*Testimony
Of
Governor M. Jodi Rell
Judiciary Committee
Tuesday, November 27, 2007*

Dear Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and Honorable Members of the Judiciary Committee:

I appreciate this opportunity to communicate with members of the Judiciary Committee about the need for reform in our criminal justice system.

As you know, after the tragic events in Cheshire last July, I created the Sentencing and Parole Review Task Force to conduct a top-to-bottom review of our criminal justice system, from arrest to release, to ensure that we do everything in our power to prevent the horrific crimes that occurred in Cheshire from ever happening again. I charged the Task Force with examining all aspects of our criminal justice system, identifying entities and processes that should be changed, and making recommendations to me to effect such change. The Task Force has examined the processes and procedures by which the state charges, sentences and releases offenders, has conducted a public hearing and will shortly begin drafting their recommendations. I know that you have been engaged in a similar endeavor and have followed the work of the Task Force.

My staff and I have reviewed all of the proposals currently pending before your Committee. I support the following concepts contained within these proposals:

- I believe that we need a full-time Board of Pardons and Paroles. Offenders must only be released into the community after a thorough review of the complete record by a panel of professionals.
- The Board of Pardons and Paroles should not hold a hearing on the suitability of parole release for an offender unless the Board has reviewed the complete file on the offender.
- We must ensure that all components of the criminal justice system, including prosecutors, judges, the Department of Correction and parole and probation officers, have prompt access to all relevant information. We must redesign our current information technology systems to accomplish this goal as soon as possible.

- Residential burglary of an occupied dwelling has the potential to escalate into serious violence. I support the strengthening of the penalties for residential burglary, or, alternatively, the creation of a separate crime of home invasion with a higher penalty.
- Persons convicted of residential burglary or home invasion should not be parole eligible until they have completed eighty-five percent of their sentence.
- We have all heard from constituents across the state who have urged us to be tough on career criminals. To ensure the safety of our citizens, I support increased penalties for persistent offenders.
- As you know, I have directed the Department of Correction to increase the number of offenders in the community being electronically monitored. I support increased use of global positioning systems for this purpose.
- I believe we need to provide additional re-entry services for offenders released into the community, particularly in Hartford, Bridgeport and New Haven. These programs are critical to ensuring that offenders do not recidivate.

In short, we must examine all components of the criminal justice system to ensure that the public is protected from violent individuals, that victims' rights are respected and that offenders are treated fairly and even-handedly. To achieve these goals, I encourage you to listen to the citizens of Connecticut who have come to testify before you. I believe that the different perspectives and ideas they present will assist you in your duties and ultimately help in creating an improved criminal justice system.

As you can see, we have much common ground. I urge you to work cooperatively with my Sentencing and Parole Review Task Force to develop a comprehensive set of proposals that addresses the many challenges our criminal justice system faces, while maintaining the integrity of our Constitutional spending cap. If you are able to achieve that goal, I would welcome a special legislative session to enact real and meaningful criminal justice reforms in the new year.

Thank you once again for listening to my voice and the voices of the people of Connecticut. I look forward to working with you on these complex and critically important issues in the coming weeks, and to restoring the public's trust and confidence in our criminal justice system.