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Testimony in Support of House Bill Judiciary proposal # 8
Presented November 27, 2007 before the Judiciary Committee

Dear Chairman Lawlor and McDonald and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee,

The horrific murders of Hayley, Michaela and Jennifer Petit and the assault of William Petit have brought to light the innate problems within our current sentencing and parole laws.

House Bill Judiciary proposal # 8 addresses many of the problems that exist. H.B Judiciary proposal # 8 makes a number of changes to the existing law. The changes proposed by this bill will strengthen laws regarding home invasions, correct and strengthen the three strikes law, institute a "Castle Doctrine", and establish a parolee registry.

The bill will remedy the constitutional flaw identified by the Connecticut Supreme Court that will grant juries the power to decide on enhanced sentences for criminals instead of judges. This simple fix requires little discussion and should have been corrected months ago. The bill would strengthen our crime laws by making Connecticut's three-strikes law a **true** three-strike law by requiring every third conviction to result in life sentences without the possibility of parole. The message coming from the General Assembly should be clear; Connecticut will not stand for perpetual offenders who commit serious crimes.

We need to increase penalties for burglars and define burglary as a "violent crime" and therefore be subject to the state's sentencing statutes. The bill will classify someone who commits first, second and third degree burglary, regardless of the lack of a weapon, as a violent offender and increases the mandatory sentence for each offense (Once in the home a reserve of weapons is available; knives, blunt instruments etc., anything could be used as "deadly weapon"). The bill also specifies all burglaries as a violent offense or should be amended to do so, regardless of whether someone is in the home or not at the time of the burglary. The reason is simple; if the burglar has the audacity to break into someone's home he assumes the potential for someone to be home in bed, in the shower, or anywhere else, that is not visible to the burglar prior to break-in. If he continues, despite that chance, he is recklessly endangering himself and others and assumes the same consequences as those who break into an occupied home. Furthermore, to safeguard homeowners who are present at home during a burglary, a "castle doctrine" is included to provide homeowners the ability to protect themselves if they feel they are in danger without fear of prosecution. Why should a criminal have the right to sue for bodily harm incurred when he is breaking the law and jeopardizing someone else?

Finally, the bill establishes a Parolee Registry of all violent offenders who are released from prison and subjects all burglars to mandatory electronic monitoring, including the use of global positioning systems. The registry would be similar to that of the Sex Offenders list and would allow concerned citizens to take proper precautions around those on the registry. The electronic monitoring would allow us to ensure that parolees stay within the boundaries of the law and if not, provide immediate feedback to their whereabouts.

The only thing more tragic than the crime itself would be the legislature's failure to act responsibly and swiftly to eliminate the lax laws that allowed these murders to take place. The legislature has a fundamental responsibility to ensure and protect the safety and well-being of every citizen. It would be unconscionable for us to do nothing on this issue or do just the bare minimum.

Some of the items I feel are common sense. I appreciate the Committees consideration of this proposal. I know the committee has a lot to review and process. I ask the committee to vote favorably on HB Judiciary proposal # 8 and allow for a full debate and discussion on the House and Senate Floors.