

Good Afternoon distinguished members of the Connecticut Sentencing Commission:  
My name is Barbara Fair and I am a licensed clinical social worker and founder of a grassroots organization, My Brother's Keeper. I am here to testify in support of "Second Look" legislation that will afford children sentenced to long sentences for crimes committed under the age of eighteen a "meaningful opportunity" to obtain a release from prison, under parole supervision, prior to the end of that sentence. Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony on behalf of those children and their parents. Currently in Connecticut we have nearly 300 people who may be affected by the Supreme Court decision which mandates that they receive a review of their sentences. The Supreme Court came to that decision after taking into account science which indicates that the brain does not reach maturity until the age of 25. To sentence a teen as though they have the brain capacity to function as an adult is not only cruel and exceptionally punitive, it is morally wrong.

Our society puts measures in place that prohibits a teen to marry, enter legal contracts, open credit cards, marry, enter military service, secure government positions, sit on juries and vote. We do so because we recognize that at that stage of development a child is more likely to be reckless, impulsive and influenced by peers; making them poor decision makers. We know they will not fully understand the consequences of their actions. We put safeguards in place to protect our children from making life altering mistakes and yet when they commit a serious criminal offense we treat them as though somehow in the stage of development of **these particular children**, unlike other children, they are adults. Involvement in criminal behavior is not the determining factor in distinguishing child from adult. Brain development is the fundamental difference between child and adult.

We as a society **must** work to be more proactive and less reactive to crime. We **must** implement a lot more preventative measures to help children and families in crisis. Society will pay in the end when they choose to keep our heads buried in the sand while urban centers deteriorate and children are left to squander in poverty, drug addiction, unemployment, substandard education, unmet mental health needs, constant trauma and the mass incarceration of their parents. When we fail to meet the needs of **all** children on the front end we will pay dearly on the back end in spiraling corrections budgets and societal decay. If societies are truly judge by the way they treat their children, elders, sick and poor we are in a lot of trouble.

The US Supreme Court mandates that we act in accordance to law. We cannot ignore its call. It is a call to justice and fairness for the children caught up in the adult system, a breeding ground for crime. The decision is not an opening to discuss if we should make changes in Connecticut. It is **a mandate to act**. Prison is harsh for adults. It is especially harsh for a child forced into an adult system.

I am hopeful that Connecticut will seek fairness in dealing with our children and families in despair. Let's reallocate huge funding from incarceration and programs that don't work. Let's work toward building a more just, equitable, caring and compassionate society in Connecticut.