NATASHA M. PIERRE, ESQ.
State Victim Advocate

Testimony of Natasha M. Pierre, Esq., State Victim Advocate
Submitted to the Judiciary Committee
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Good morning Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, Senator Kissel, Representative Rebimbas and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. For the record, my name is Natasha Pierre and I am the Victim Advocate for the State of Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony concerning:

> Senate Bill No. 1127, *An Act Concerning Mandatory Minimum Sentences for Children Tried as Adults*
> House Bill No. 7050, *An Act Concerning the Juvenile Justice System*

While the Office of the Victim Advocate (OVA) is extremely mindful of the movement to evaluate and modify the manner in which the criminal justice system responds to criminal juvenile offenders, this movement is not taking into consideration the impact of these changes on victims. The OVA understands that certain U.S. Supreme Court decisions have driven some of the proposed changes, however, there appears to be an endless stream of proposals that go beyond the scope of the court decisions.

Senate Bill No. 1127 would allow the court to depart from any mandatory minimum sentence in a case of a juvenile being tried and sentenced as an adult.

This proposal appears to be a response to a recent Connecticut Supreme Court decision, *State v. Taylor G*[1]. Taylor G. was tried as an adult and convicted of sexual assault offenses that he committed when he was 14-15 years old against his 6-7 year old cousin. He was sentenced to a mandatory term of ten years imprisonment. The Supreme Court upheld the defendant's sentence and rejected the defendant's claim that the mandatory sentence amounted to cruel and unusual punishment.

Section 1 of House Bill No. 7050 attempts to further dilute the manner in which the criminal justice system responds to serious crimes committed by juvenile offenders by eliminating the automatic transfer of Class B felonies to adult court.

[1] Supreme Court Docket No. SC19222 (March 17, 2015).

Again, the OVA recognizes that juvenile offenders are not adult offenders; however, there are some crimes that are so serious, including class A and B felonies that require the system to respond appropriately through the transfer from juvenile court to the adult criminal docket.

I must emphasize to you that from a crime victim's perspective, the impact of the crime is no less because the crime was committed by a juvenile. In the case I mentioned earlier, for that 6 year old, it doesn't matter that the offender was 15 years old. She is forever harmed by that action.

The impact of crime may include emotional trauma, physical trauma and injury, psychological trauma and financial burdens. Although crime victims are afforded certain participatory rights through the criminal justice process, the process does not allow for crime victims to recover from the impact of crime.

With each proposal made to lighten the burden or consequences for juvenile offenders, crime victims are led back to court for sentence review hearings, sentence reduction consideration, appeals, parole hearings, violation of probation hearings, etc. In some cases, crime victims have been waiting for the criminal justice process to end for more than twenty years.

These changes have a direct impact on the victims of juvenile offenders and those needs and rights need as much consideration as the ones given to the offenders. There needs to more funding and resources dedicated to victim's services throughout the state to handle the resulting trauma victims will experience over and over again as more opportunities are granted to review and amend sentences. I would be more than willing to work with you and other advocates to develop a comprehensive plan that does not focus solely on offender rights.

I urge the Committee to reject Senate Bill No. 1127 and Section 1 of House Bill No. 7050.
Thank you for consideration of my testimony.

Respectfully submitted,

Natasha M. Pierre, Esq.
State Victim Advocate

505 Hudson Street 5th Floor, Hartford, CT 06106 ▪ Phone: (860) 550-6632 ▪ Fax: (860) 560-7065 ▪ www.ct.gov/ova