



Testimony of Nazgol Ghandnoosh

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In Support of An Act Concerning
Sentence Modification
Eligibility, Senate Bill 1327

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Committee

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Criminological and Legal Experts and the Experience of Other States Support Enacting Broad Second Look Resentencing in Connecticut

Established in 1986, The Sentencing Project advocates for effective and humane responses to crime that minimize imprisonment and criminalization of youth and adults by promoting racial, ethnic, economic, and gender justice.

I am Nazgol Ghandnoosh, Director of Research at The Sentencing Project. I have been researching criminal legal issues for 15 years, with a focus on extreme sentences and reforms that seek to scale them back, as well as on racial disparities in sentencing, and national trends in decarceration. I have published numerous articles and chapters in academic and professional journals and books, and authored many reports published by The Sentencing Project.

Connecticut Senate Bill 1327 would expand the state's "second look" process by addressing several excessive restrictions currently in place in the state's sentence modification statute.¹ SB 1327 would allow people serving mandatory minimum sentencing to petition for modification and remove the requirement for consent from the state's attorney for a modification hearing for certain cases resolved through plea deals. SB 1327 would also reduce wait times re-petitioning for a sentence modification after a denial.

SB 1327 would allow Connecticut to correct limitations in its current sentence modification process and improve its standing among states that have enacted second look legislation.² In this testimony, we provide an overview of the growing second look reform movement, highlight support for the approach from leading legal experts and criminological evidence, and discuss the disproportionate imposition of extreme sentences on African Americans and young people in Connecticut, as well as the elderly status of many people who have served very lengthy sentences.

A Growing Number of States are Taking a Second Look at Lengthy Sentences

Connecticut's current sentence modification law places it in company with several other states that have created second look resentencing opportunities:

- Six states—Connecticut, Delaware, Maryland, Oregon, Florida, and North Dakota—and the District of Columbia allow for an incarcerated person to ask the court to reconsider a sentence, usually under certain conditions such as age at the time of the offense and amount of time served.³ These second look laws go beyond resentencing opportunities created in response to the 2012 U.S. Supreme Court holding in *Miller v. Alabama*, which

¹An Act Concerning The Reduction of A Sentence By The Sentencing Court Or A Judge. [S.B. 1327](#), Gen. Assemb. (Conn. 2025); Connecticut General Statutes, Sections 53a-39.

²Feldman, B. (2024). [The Second Look Movement: A Review of the Nation's Sentence Review Laws](#). The Sentencing Project.

³Conn. Gen. Stat. Ann. § 53a-39; Del. Code Ann. tit. 11, § 4204A; Md. Code Ann., Crim. Proc. § 8-110; Or. Rev. Stat. Ann. § 420A.203; Fla. Stat. Ann. § 921.1402; N.D. Cent. Code Ann. § 12.1-32-13.1; D.C. Code Ann. § 24-403.03.

narrowed mandatory life without parole ("LWOP") sentences for youth under age 18. Connecticut permits a judicial second look at any time, for most convictions, except those subject to mandatory minimum sentences, and often requiring prosecutorial approval. Maryland, Delaware, Oregon, Florida, and North Dakota enacted second look laws for those who were under 18 at the time of the offense and who have served a term of years, ranging between 15-30 years.⁴ Lastly, the District of Columbia permits a sentence review for those who were under 25 at the time of the offense and have served at least 15 years. The law has been so successful that the DC Council has sought to expand second look to all ages.

- Five states—California, Illinois, Minnesota, Oregon, and Washington—have enacted prosecutor-initiated resentencing laws that allow prosecutors to trigger the second look hearing.⁵
- Oklahoma is the fourth state to pass a domestic violence survivor resentencing bill, after New York, Illinois, and California. This reform creates a trauma-informed resentencing process for crime survivors—disproportionately women and members of the LGBTQ community—who have suffered interpersonal violence, family abuse, and trafficking.⁶
- State courts have also begun building on the U.S. Supreme Court's restrictions of juvenile life without parole sentences. In 2021, the Washington Supreme Court extended *Miller* protections to those under 21 years old who were sentenced to mandatory life without parole, based on the state's constitution that prohibits "cruel punishment."⁷ In 2021, the Michigan Supreme Court held that mandatory LWOP sentences for 18 year olds convicted of first-degree murder violates the Michigan State Constitution prohibition against "cruel or unusual punishment."⁸ In 2024, Massachusetts became the first state to ban the penalty of mandatory and discretionary LWOP for those 21 years old and under, based on the State Constitution's ban on "cruel *or* unusual punishment."⁹
- Legislatures in states including Kansas, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, New Hampshire, and New York, are considering second look bills in 2025.¹⁰

⁴ The statutes in North Dakota and Florida apply prospectively only.

⁵ For the People. (2022). *Advancing prosecutor-initiated resentencing: a guide for prosecutors, policymakers, and advocates*; For the People (2023, May 19). Minnesota passes prosecutor-initiated resentencing law, enabling prosecutors to revisit past cases in the interest of justice.

⁶ Komar, L., et al. (2023). *Sentencing reform for criminalized survivors: Learning from New York's Domestic Violence Survivors Justice Act*. *The Sentencing Project*.

⁷ *Matter of Monschke*, 482 P.3d 276 (Wash. 2021); Johnson, G. (2021, March 11). *Court overturns automatic life sentences for young killers*. The Associated Press.

⁸ *People v. Parks*, 987 N.W.2d 161 (Mich. 2022).

⁹ *Commonwealth v. Mattis*, 224 N.E.3d 410 (Mass. 2024). See also Barry, K. C. (2024, January 18). *Massachusetts Rejects Harmful Federal Standard for Evaluating Whether Punishment Is Unconstitutional*. State Court Report.

¹⁰ FAMM. (2025, February 3). *Pending second chances legislation*. https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/13a-FuNUNGaphzq-GsAd8E54veaZhU_nWkmh2gxy-iCs/edit#gid=570755306

But as Gaylord Salters and Eddie DeLeon,¹¹ beneficiaries of Connecticut's existing reforms, have noted, many other worthy candidates for resentencing remain left behind. Connecticut's current sentence modification law requires those who pled guilty and received a sentence exceeding seven years to obtain prosecutorial approval for a sentence reduction, and excludes all mandatory sentences from review. SB 1327 proposes creating a more robust second look sentencing process, removing these unnecessary roadblocks to justice.

Existing Resentencing Reforms Have Been Successful From a Public Safety Perspective

People given a second chance after serving lengthy sentences of imprisonment for the most serious crimes have extremely low recidivism rates. This fact indicates that they have been imprisoned long past the point at which they pose an above-average public safety risk. For example:

- Among 188 life-sentenced individuals released from prison due to the 2012 *Unger v. State* decision by the Maryland Court of Appeals, which found that a jury instruction used by Maryland courts until 1981 had denied defendants due process rights, only five had returned to prison after five years of release for either a violation of parole or for a new crime, well below the state's overall recidivism rate.¹²
- Washington, DC's second look law allows people who were under age 25 at the time of their crime to be resentenced after they have served at least 15 years. As of June 2023, 195 people had been released under this second look law, and only seven (4%) had been rearrested.¹³

Studies of several other jurisdictions where people have been resentenced and released after their juvenile life without parole sentence was deemed unconstitutional have found similarly low recidivism rates.¹⁴

National Organizations Have Called for Second Look Laws

The current second look movement is supported by leading legal experts. Multiple national legal organizations have called for the passage of second look laws for all ages, regardless of the conviction, in order to reduce excessively long sentences:

¹¹ DeLeon, E. (2025, January 27). [Opinion: I was one of the lucky ones. Here's how Connecticut's Second Look law is falling short.](#) *Hartford Courant*; Feldman, B. (2024). [The Second Look Movement: A Review of the Nation's Sentence Review Laws.](#) The Sentencing Project.

¹² Justice Policy Institute. (2018). [The Ungers, 5 years and counting.](#)

¹³ Allen, W. (2023). [Testimony of Warren Allen at Hearing on B25-291 before the Committee on the Judiciary and Public Safety of the Council of the District of Columbia.](#) The Sentencing Project.

¹⁴ FAMM. (2025). [Recidivism and other outcome data for people serving life or long sentences who have received second chances.](#)

- The **American Bar Association** adopted Resolution 502 that urges governments to enact legislation permitting courts to take a second look at incarcerated people after no more than 10 years of their sentence.¹⁵
- The **American Law Institute's Model Penal Code** recommends that states adopt a second look judicial process that would include sentence review after 10 years of incarceration for youth who committed their offense under age 18 and after 15 years of imprisonment for others.¹⁶
- **Fair and Just Prosecution** issued a statement signed by over 60 current and former elected prosecutors and law enforcement leaders that recommends a sentence review after "15 years or more" of incarceration for middle-aged and elderly incarcerated people.¹⁷

Several expert organizations have also called for the elimination of mandatory minimum sentences, including the American Law Institute in its Model Penal Code, the American Bar Association, and the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund.¹⁸ Barring people serving such sentences from accessing Connecticut's sentence modification law would prolong an injustice without contributing to community safety.

Lengthy Sentences Do Not Advance Public Safety

Criminologists have identified four main purposes of incarceration: rehabilitation, incapacitation, deterrence, and retribution. Criminological research has also established that lengthy prison sentences do not advance these goals and are in fact counterproductive because they divert limited resources from more effective investments in community safety.

Rehabilitation and Incapacitation

One way that incarceration is intended to promote public safety is by rehabilitating people who pose a risk to our communities, and by incapacitating them until they can safely return home. Lengthy sentences incarcerate many people well past this point, producing diminishing returns on incarceration.

A number of criminological research approaches have shown that lengthy prison terms incarcerate people who no longer pose a public safety risk.¹⁹ One line of inquiry has studied

¹⁵ American Bar Association (2022). [Resolution 502](#).

¹⁶ American Law Institute (2017). *Model Penal Code: Sentencing, Proposed Final Draft*, pp. 644, 681.
 American Law Institute (2017). [Model Penal Code: Sentencing §305.6 – Modification of long-term prison sentences: Principles for legislation](#). See also Reitz, K. (2017, June 7). [New Model Penal Code for criminal sentencing: Comprehensive reform recommendations for state legislatures](#).

¹⁷ Fair & Just Prosecution (2021, April). [Joint statement on sentencing second chances and addressing past extreme sentences](#). [Press Release.]

¹⁸ American Bar Association (2017). [ABA opposes mandatory minimum sentences](#); American Law Institute (2017). American Law Institute (2017). *Model Penal Code: Sentencing, Proposed Final Draft; Justice Roundtable*. (2020). [Transformative justice: Recommendations for the new administration and the 117th Congress](#).

¹⁹ Kazemian, L., & Farrington, D. P. (2018). Advancing knowledge about residual criminal careers: A follow-up to age 56 from the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 57, 1-10; Prescott, J. J., Pyle, B., & Starr, S. B. (2020). Understanding violent-crime recidivism. *Notre Dame Law Review*, 95(4), 1643–

recidivism among people released from prison and found significantly lower recidivism rates among people who have served longer than six to 10 years compared to those who have served shorter sentences, likely because they have aged out of criminal activity. For example, using a broad definition of recidivism (rearrest), the United States Sentencing Commission found that people who had served at least 10 years in federal prison had a reoffending rate that was 29% lower than similarly situated individuals who received shorter sentences.²⁰ When the Bureau of Justice Statistics examined recidivism rates for people with violent convictions released from state prisons, it found that those who had served more than six years were 25% less likely to recidivate than those who had served one year.²¹ Finally, studies of people released after decades of imprisonment for the most serious crimes have found extremely low recidivism rates, meaning that these individuals have been imprisoned until they pose a fraction of the recidivism risk of those released from shorter sentences.²² These studies support reassessing prison terms within the decade mark.

Another approach has been to follow the same group of individuals over time to determine the duration of their "criminal careers." These studies have found that most people who commit crime desist from criminal offending within four to 12 years after they begin.²³ In their long-duration study of British men up to age 56, Lila Kazemian and David Farrington found among those who were convicted more than once, desistance typically took 16 years, and included convictions that would not merit incarceration.²⁴ Based on this evidence, they concluded: "The harsher sentences ... imposed on individuals convicted of violent offenses may serve a retributive purpose, but they are not justified by recidivism data or by our analyses of residual criminal careers."²⁵ In addition, scholars examining the likelihood of being arrested after a period of time had passed since a prior arrest have found that people with criminal records pose the same public safety risk as the general public within seven to eight years after their last arrest, or less time for some offenses.²⁶

1698; Levine, B., & Kettunen, E. (2014). [Paroling people who committed serious crimes: What is the actual risk?](#) Citizens Alliance on Prisons and Public Spending.

²⁰ The Commission also found that the retroactive application of the Drugs Minus Two Amendment, reducing average sentences from 146 months to 121 months resulted in no change in recidivism. United States Sentencing Commission. (2022). [Length of incarceration and recidivism \(2022\)](#); United States Sentencing Commission. (2020). [Retroactivity & recidivism: The Drugs Minus Two Amendment](#).

²¹ Antenangeli, L., & Durose, M.R. (2021). [Recidivism of prisoners released in 24 states in 2008: A 10-year follow-up period \(2008–2018\)](#). Bureau of Justice Statistics.

²² Nellis, A. (2021). [A new lease on life](#). The Sentencing Project.

²³ See Kazemian, L. (2021). [Pathways to desistance from crime among juveniles and adults: Applications to criminal justice policy and practice](#). National Institute of Justice; Blumstein, A., & Piquero, A. (2007). Restore rationality to sentencing policy. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 6(4), 679-687; Piquero, A., Hawkins, J., & Kazemian, L. (2012). Criminal career patterns. In R. Loeber & D. P. Farrington (Eds.), *From juvenile delinquency to adult crime: Criminal careers, justice policy, and prevention* (pp. 14–46). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

²⁴ Kazemian, L., & Farrington, D. P. (2018). Advancing knowledge about residual criminal careers: A follow-up to age 56 from the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 57, 1-10

²⁵ Kazemian, L., & Farrington, D. P. (2018). Advancing knowledge about residual criminal careers: A follow-up to age 56 from the Cambridge Study in Delinquent Development. *Journal of Criminal Justice*, 57, 1-10, p. 9.

²⁶ For example, a study of 18 year olds who were arrested for robbery in New York in 1980 found that after staying arrest-free for 7.7 years, they were no more likely to be arrested for any crime than the general population. For those initially arrested for aggravated assault, the "redemption time," as the authors call it, was even shorter: 4.3 years. (Incarceration after first arrest, the authors explain, occurred in 10% of the robbery cases examined and excluding

These findings correspond with research on the age-crime curve, which measures the proportion of individuals in various age groups who engage in crime. Arrest trends between 1980 and 2010 reveal that for a range of offenses, including robbery and murder, criminal offending peaked around the late teenage years or early 20s, then began a gradual decline.²⁷ The fact that this pattern holds true for violent crimes is notable because well over half (63%) of people in state prisons in 2021 had violent convictions.²⁸ This proportion was even higher among those sentenced to 10 years or longer (76% had violent convictions) and those who had already served 10 years (89% had violent convictions).²⁹

Deterrence

In addition to incapacitating people when they no longer pose a criminal threat, long sentences also fail to deter others from criminal activity. As Daniel Nagin, professor of public policy and statistics at Carnegie Mellon University and a leading national expert on deterrence, writes: "Increases in already long prison sentences, say from 20 years to life, do not have material deterrent effects on crime."³⁰ Research has found that long sentences are limited in deterring future crimes because most people do not expect to be apprehended for a crime, are not familiar with relevant legal penalties, or commit crime with their judgment compromised by substance use or mental health problems.³¹

The expectation of getting away with crime, even violent crime, is not unreasonable, given FBI data showing that police “clear,” i.e., make an arrest, in fewer than two-thirds of murders . The clearance rate for reported rapes falls to one-third.³² These low clearance rates are a key reason that criminologists emphasize that the *certainty* of punishment is a more effective deterrent than its *severity*.³³ Nagin's survey of research on this issue with University of Chicago professor

these individuals from the study did not significantly change the findings.) Blumstein, A., & Nakamura, K. (2009). Redemption in the presence of widespread criminal background checks. *Criminology*, 47(2), 327-359, p. 343; see also Kurlychek, M. C., Brame, R., & Bushway, S. D. (2006). Scarlet letters and recidivism: Does an old criminal record predict future offending? *Criminology & Public Policy*, 5, 483–503; Kurlychek, M., Brame, R., & Bushway, S. D. (2007). Enduring risk? Old criminal records and predictions of future criminal involvement. *Crime & Delinquency*, 53(1), 64–83.

²⁷ Peak arrest levels for young people have dramatically fallen in recent years. Loeber, R., & Farrington, D. (2014). Age-crime curve. Bruinsma & D. Weisburd (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of Criminology and Criminal Justice*. Springer, pp. 12–18; Neil, R., & Sampson, R. (2021). The birth lottery of history: Arrest over the life course of multiple cohorts coming of age, 1995–2018. *American Journal of Sociology*, 126(5), 1127–1178.

²⁸ Carson, E. A., Kluckow, R. (2023). [Prisoners in 2022 – Statistical tables](#). Bureau of Justice Statistics.

²⁹ Specifically, the violent convictions of those who had served 10 years or more were: murder (representing 39% of all who had served this length of time), rape/sexual assault (20%), robbery (13%), aggravated or simple assault (12%), negligent manslaughter (1%), and other violent crimes (4%). The violent convictions of those sentenced to 10 years or more were: murder (23% of all who had sentences of this length), rape/sexual assault (20%), robbery (14%), aggravated or simple assault (13%), negligent manslaughter (2%), and other violent crimes (4%). United States Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics. *National Corrections Reporting Program, 1991-2019: Selected Variables*. Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research [distributor].

³⁰ Nagin, D. (2019, March 21). [Guest post: Reduce prison populations by reducing life sentences](#). *Washington Post*.

³¹ Robinson, P., & Darley, J. (2004). Does criminal law deter? A behavioural science investigation. *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, 24(2), 173–205.

³² Federal Bureau of Investigation. (2019). [Crime in the United States, 2019: Percent of offenses cleared by arrest or exceptional means by population group](#). Department of Justice, Table 25.

³³ National Institute of Justice. (2016). [Five things about deterrence](#). U.S. Department of Justice.

Steven Durlauf concludes: "For the general incarceration of aged criminals to be socially efficient, it must have a deterrent effect on younger criminals ... Simply no reliable evidence is available that such an effect is sufficiently large to justify the costs of long prison sentences."³⁴

Retribution

Incarceration is also designed to achieve the goal of retribution, even if the incarcerated individual is no longer a public safety risk. Some amount of retribution may be desirable to some crime victims and to society as a whole. But as policymakers it's important for you to understand two ways that extreme sentences offer too much retribution.

First, victims and survivors are not monolithic and harmed individuals sometimes begin and move towards different views regarding just punishment for their suffering. As Douglas Berman, Law Professor at Ohio State University, has acknowledged, "Victim interests may not always run toward treating sentences as ... final."³⁵ For some crime survivors like Jeanne Bishop, who lost three family members to murders committed by a teenager, "An alternative type of 'finality' exists.... It happens when the work of punishment, penitence, remorse and rehabilitation is complete, and a young offender can re-enter society."³⁶

Crime survivors sometimes describe a transformation in their views, as can be seen among high-profile survivors who once advocated for severe penalties but are now working to undo their impact. This includes Samantha Broun, who now advocates in favor of second chances for people with life sentences in Pennsylvania. Broun testified for stronger restrictions on release from prison in 1995, after her mother was the victim of a violent crime perpetrated by a man whose murder sentence had been recently commuted. Broun has since expressed discomfort that people are still behind bars because of policy changes made in the wake of her mother's victimization.³⁷ Another such advocate is Patty Wetterling, who lobbied for registering individuals convicted of sex-related offenses after her son's abduction in 1989, but has since become a vocal critic of registries. Wetterling told *American Public Media* in 2016, "Locking them up forever, labeling them, and not allowing them community support doesn't work. I've turned 180 (degrees) from where I was."³⁸ Delivering the keynote speech at the Mitchell

³⁴ Durlauf, S., & Nagin, D. (2011). Imprisonment and crime: Can both be reduced? *Criminology and Public Policy*, 10(1), 13–54, p. 38.

³⁵ Berman, D. (2014). Re-balancing fitness, fairness, and finality for sentences. *The Wake Forest Journal of Law & Policy*, 4(1), 151–177, p. 175.

³⁶ Bishop, J. (2015). A victims' family member on juvenile life without parole sentences: "Brutal finality" and unfinished souls. *DePaul Journal for Social Justice*, 9(1), 85-92, p. 92.

³⁷ Broun, S., & Allison, J. (2016, December 9). *20 years later*. This American Life.

<https://www.thisamericanlife.org/604/20-years-later>; DiFilippo, D. (2016, November 1). *Stepping back from vengeance; seeking reformative justice*. WHYY. <https://whyy.org/articles/stepping-back-from-vengeance-seeking-reformative-justice/>

³⁸ Baran, M., & Vogel, J. (2016, October 4). *Sex-offender registries: How the Wetterling abduction changed the country*. APM Reports. <https://www.apmreports.org/story/2016/10/04/sex-offender-registries-wetterling-abduction>; Wetterling, P. (2019, February 28). Keynote speech: Spring 2019 symposium -- Residency restriction: Wise or unwise? Mitchell Hamline School of Law. <https://mitchellhamline.edu/sex-offense-litigation-policy/2019/03/20/spring-2019-symposium-residency-restrictions-wise-or-unwise/>

Hamline School of Law's symposium on residency restrictions and registries, she voiced concern over the effectiveness and harms caused by a policy for which she once advocated.

Second, as policymakers you are trusted to uphold the societal value of not inflicting too much retribution. Ultimately, some people impacted by violent crime will object to resentencing even if resentencing does not pose a public safety risk. Often, survivors' limited contact during incarceration with the individual who caused them harm leaves them ill-prepared to assess risk of future violence, especially in cases resulting in long sentences.³⁹ When the desire for additional punishment is far beyond what is needed to achieve public safety, it is worth noting, as Danielle Sered has observed:

A survivor-centered system is not a survivor-ruled system. Valuing people does not mean giving them sole and unmitigated control. The criminal justice system maintains a responsibility to safety, justice, and human dignity that it should uphold even when those interests run contrary to survivors' desires.⁴⁰

As Sered explains, in these situations the criminal legal system remains obliged to listen to survivors, to be transparent about the decision making process, and to connect them with support.

Punishment imposed by the criminal legal system is intended, in part, to displace personal acts of retaliation by survivors. But governments undertake this retribution within a scaffolding of rights and norms that is intended to ensure fairness and justice. This includes procedures to ensure that the person being punished is guilty, and laws restraining excessive punishment for their offense, such as the death penalty. After reinstating the death penalty in 1976, the Supreme Court narrowed the crimes and people for whom death could be sought in a series of cases responding to the "evolving standards of decency."⁴¹ Connecticut is among 23 states where the death penalty is prohibited,⁴² even if some crime survivors or the family members of victims would prefer to have this option. Similarly, when states curb excessive terms of imprisonment that are counterproductive to public safety and are infused, to some degree, with racial bias, this can result in a sentence modification that conflicts with the wishes of some survivors. But ultimately, as Berman suggests, reconsidering initial sentences "may foster respect for a criminal justice system willing to reconsider and recalibrate the punishment harms that it imposes upon its citizens."⁴³

More Effective Investments

³⁹ Rhine, E. E., Petersilia, J., & Reitz, R. (2015). Improving parole release in America. *Federal Sentencing Reporter*, 28(2), 96-104.

⁴⁰ Sered, D. (2017). [*Accounting for violence: How to increase safety and break our failed reliance on mass incarceration.*](#) Vera Institute of Justice, p. 15

⁴¹ Steiker, C. S., & Steiker, J. M. (2011, September 27). *Why death penalty opponents are closer to their goal than they realize.* The New Republic. <https://newrepublic.com/article/95378/troy-davis-death-penalty-abolish>

⁴² Death Penalty Information Center. (2024). *State by state.* <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/states-landing>

⁴³ Berman, D. (2014). Re-balancing fitness, fairness, and finality for sentences. *The Wake Forest Journal of Law & Policy*, 4(1), 151-177, p. 170.

Extreme sentences offer modest public safety gains and come at a high financial cost. Policymakers should consider how investments in lengthy prison terms de-emphasize more effective investments in public safety.

The Brookings Institute as well as John Jay College of Criminal Justice have created syntheses of research evidence on public health approaches to crime as guides for funding organizations, community leaders, and lawmakers.⁴⁴ Two reports from The Sentencing Project also highlight non-carceral social interventions for youth and adults to promote community safety.⁴⁵ These initiatives and policies include providing universal access to effective drug treatment, investing in community-based violence prevention programs, reimagining crisis response, and expanding mentorship and therapeutic support for youth.

Efforts to implement effective strategies to advance community safety are well under way and have been met with much success—they must now be scaled up so that we have a system of mass crime prevention rather than mass incarceration.

Extreme Sentences Are Disproportionately Imposed on People of Color and Tarnish the Legitimacy of the Criminal Legal System - A Closer Look at Connecticut

While there is growing understanding of racial disparities in incarceration, it is important to recognize that these disparities are most pronounced in lengthy and extreme sentences. In Connecticut, 7% of the prison and jail population is serving a life sentence – including sentences of life with and without the possibility of parole and virtual life sentences that can exceed 50 years.⁴⁶ These sentences are overwhelmingly imposed on African Americans (see Figure 1).⁴⁷ While African Americans comprise 13% of the state's population, they account for 54% of those serving life sentences.

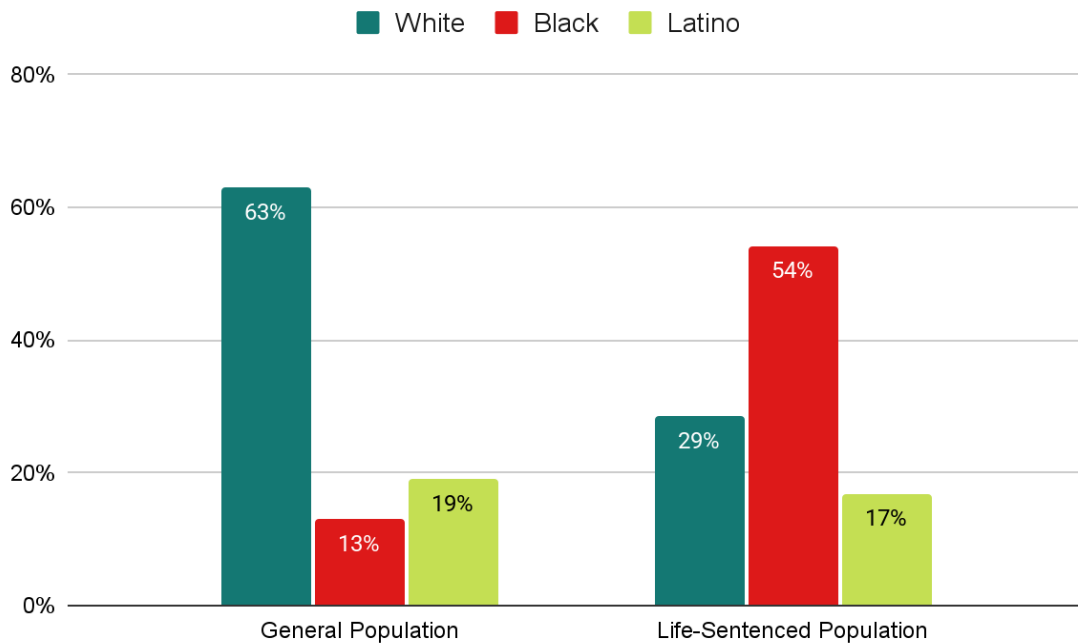
⁴⁴ John Jay College Research Advisory Group on Preventing and Reducing Community Violence. (2020). [Reducing violence without police: A review of research evidence](#); Sebastian, T., Love, H., Washington, S., Barr, A., Rahman, I., Paradis, B., Perry, A. M., & Cook, S. (2023). [A new community safety blueprint: How the federal government can address violence and harm through a public health approach](#). Brookings.

⁴⁵ Porter, N., & Komar, L. (2023). [Ending mass incarceration: Social interventions that work](#). The Sentencing Project; Mendel, R. (2023). [Effective alternatives to youth incarceration](#). The Sentencing Project.

⁴⁶ Nellis, A. & Barry, C. (2025). [A matter of life: The scope and impact of life and long term imprisonment in the United States](#). The Sentencing Project.

⁴⁷ Data on Connecticut's race and ethnic composition represents 2023 estimates: U.S. Census Bureau. (2023). [Population Estimates, July 1, 2023 \(V2023\) -- Connecticut \[Race and Hispanic Origin\]](#). Quick Facts; Nellis, A. & Barry, C. (2025). [A matter of life: The scope and impact of life and long term imprisonment in the United States](#). The Sentencing Project.

Figure 1. Racial and Ethnic Composition of Connecticut Residents Compared with Those Serving Life Sentences



Racial disparities in serious criminal offending contribute to these disparities, as does the fact that white Americans' association of crime with Black and Latino people bolsters their support for punitive policies.⁴⁸ The disproportionate imposition of extreme sentences on people of color has led the National Academies of Sciences to recommend "establishing second-look provisions for long sentences...and eliminating the death penalty" as a way to reduce racial disparities in incarceration.⁴⁹

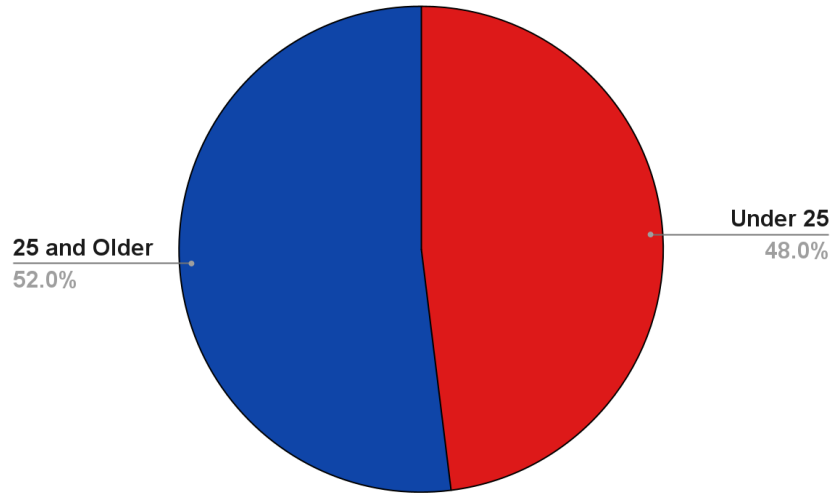
Nearly Half of People Serving Life Sentences in Connecticut Were Under the Age of 25 at the Time of Offense

Many people serving life sentences in Connecticut were still young adults when they committed their offenses, with nearly half being under 25 years old when they committed their crimes (see Figure 2). Neuroscientific research shows that those under the age of 25 and youth share similar cognitive and emotional traits, such as ongoing brain development and impulsivity, which influence culpability. For this reason, developmental neuroscience supports expanding juvenile sentencing protections to cover those under the age of 25 to allow for more developmentally appropriate responses to their crimes.

⁴⁸ Ghandnoosh, N., & Barry, C. (2023). *One in five: Disparities in crime and policing*. The Sentencing Project; Ghandnoosh, N. (2014). *Race and punishment: Racial perceptions of crime and support for punitive policies*. The Sentencing Project.

⁴⁹ Muhammad, K. G., Western, B., Negussie, Y., & Backes, E. (Eds.) (2022). *Reducing racial inequality in crime and justice: science, practice, and policy*. National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, p. S-10.

Figure 2. Connecticut Population Serving Life Sentences, by Age at Time of Offense

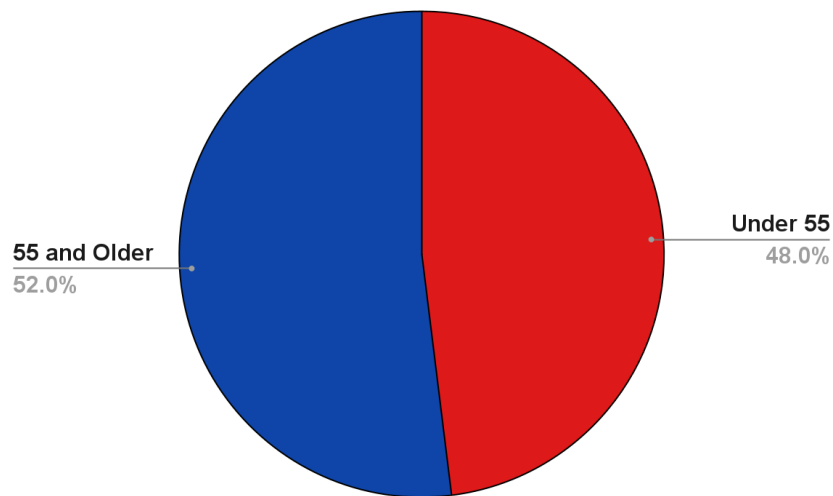


Given Connecticut's high proportion of life-sentenced individuals who were under the age of 25 at the time of their offense, the state should adopt evidence-based policy reforms aimed at balancing justice with evolving understandings of human development.

The Majority of Connecticut's Life-Sentenced Population is Now 55 Years of Age or Older

Data collected by The Sentencing Project found that 52% of Connecticut's life-sentenced population is aged 55 or older (see Figure 3). Connecticut is one of only four states where elderly individuals represent the majority of those serving life sentences.

Figure 3. Connecticut Population Serving Life Sentences, by Current Age

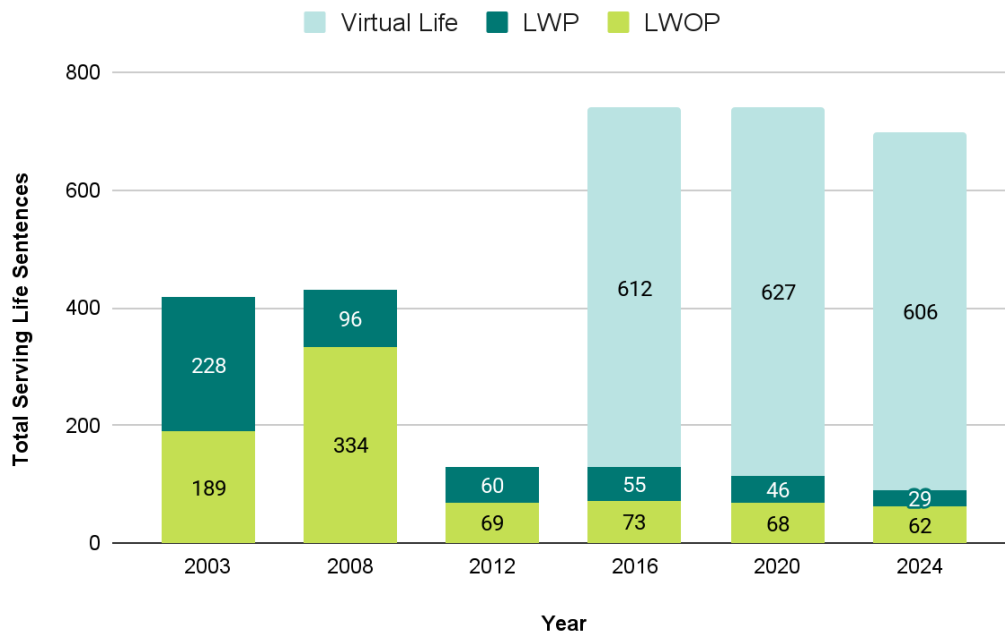


As discussed above, research shows individuals age out of criminal activity beginning in their late 20s, thus, imprisoning people for years or even decades beyond their point of dangerousness does not prevent crime. By reducing sentence lengths and expanding resentencing opportunities for elderly individuals, Connecticut would meaningfully reduce its life-sentenced population. In reducing the high costs associated with incarcerating elderly individuals, Connecticut could save hundreds of thousands of dollars each year that could be reinvested to promote community safety.⁵⁰

Connecticut's Life With Parole and Life Without Parole Populations Have Declined, Yet Lengthy Sentences Persist

In 2024, the Connecticut Department of Corrections reported to The Sentencing Project that 91 people in the state were serving life with parole (LWP) and life without parole (LWOP) sentences and 606 individuals were serving virtual life sentences (sentences reaching 50 years or more). Connecticut has drastically decreased its imposing of draconian LWP and LWOP sentences across the last decade and half, yet high levels of virtual life sentences persist (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Total Number of People Serving Life Sentences in Connecticut, 2003-2024



Note: This figure excludes those serving virtual life sentences prior to 2016 due to lack of data availability.

⁵⁰ Mai, C. & Subramanian, R. (2017). *The price of prisons: Examining state spending trends, 2010 - 2015*. Vera Institute of Justice.

While the use of LWP and LWOP appears to be falling out of favor, some individuals in the state continue to serve these extreme sentences. A more robust second look law would allow Connecticut to ensure that justice is being served for these individuals and the more sizable population serving extreme "virtual" life sentences.