

**Testimony of Mike Lawlor
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Reducing crime, reducing spending and restoring confidence, in that order, are the three criminal justice priorities of the Malloy Administration.

Public safety and reducing crime is the main job of the many professionals who work in the criminal justice system. It's as simple as that.

Throughout state government, we are finding ways to do more with less. Around the nation both red and blue states are reducing crime and saving money by investing in justice initiatives that work.

Today, too many victims lose faith in the system's ability to deliver justice or to treat them with dignity and respect. Many African-Americans and Latinos believe the system is unfair to them. Scandals and corruption at every level have undermined trust among all citizens. Distain, discrimination and dishonesty at any level of state government will not be tolerated in my administration.

Those of us who have worked in the criminal justice system have come to understand the importance of honesty and empathy when handling all criminal cases, from murder trials to minor thefts. Over the last year we have reached out to front line law enforcement and top-level officials to reinforce the crime victims' rights enshrined in our state's constitution.

In recent weeks we have experienced the specter of bias and discrimination by law enforcement professionals, and in recent years the state has not met its responsibility to enforce long established anti-racial profiling laws. We are focused on righting that wrong.

The good news is that crime is down, and down significantly. In Connecticut reported crime is at a 44 year low. Like most states, we have adopted proven best-practices and they are working. Community policing, state-of-the-art technology and risk-reduction interventions for offenders are all paying off.

In 2011 the number of persons arrested by police dropped by 11.4% compared to the average of the previous three years alone. Recidivism among offenders on probation has dropped more than 10% in the last five years. For minor offenders diverted into alternative sanctions programs the drop has been 21% over three years.

Last year, the General Assembly enacted an emerging national “best practice”: Risk Reduction Earned Credits for offenders serving prison sentences. Although this tool is one of the most restrictive in the nation, it builds on positive results in states like Ohio, Kansas and Texas. We believe this will result in a significant drop in recidivism for inmates leaving prison.

We are starting to reap the dividend that goes along with a dropping crime rate: there are fewer people being sent to prison. Three prisons have closed in the last two years, including the one closed by my predecessor. Last month there were 3000 fewer inmates than in 2008. Most projections call for a continuing drop in the prison population and, as is the case in most states, we expect to be able to close more prison facilities in the years to come. Keep in mind that Connecticut had only 6,000 inmates in 1986. On February 1, 2008 we had 19,900.

Today, there are more than 50,000 offenders being supervised by probation officers, but just a few years ago there were more than 60,000. Although “violation of probation” is the #1 crime for which inmates are serving time in our state, those violations are dropping and so is the re-incarceration rate.

We have adopted a strategy of “reinvestment”. Portions of future savings will be reinvested in the various types of supervision and treatment that have proven to reduce crime. The days when Connecticut spends more taxpayer money on running prisons than on public higher education are over.

To help restore the confidence of victims in our justice system, we have focused on three crimes which have cost the lives of far too many citizens of our state: domestic violence, drunk driving and urban shootings.

We have built upon initiatives begun by our General Assembly to reform our domestic violence laws to protect innocent victims.

We have worked with Mothers Against Drunk Driving to enact a historic change to our law: mandatory ignition interlock devices in the cars of all repeat drunk drivers.

We are fully invested in initiatives in New Haven, Hartford and other cities in our state to bring an end to the senseless killings of young African-American men. To accomplish this, we have focused on the groups and gangs that are responsible for these shootings and the neighborhoods in which they wreak their havoc. Working with community leaders, clergy, law enforcement and our federal partners, Connecticut’s prosecutors, probation, parole and corrections professionals are now on the job and getting results.

To address the long-overlooked issue of racial disparities in our criminal justice system, the Governor has introduced and the legislature has enacted overdue changes to our criminal laws. 72% of our prison population is either African American or Latino. The disparity is even more dramatic among non-violent drug

offenders and probation violators. With that in mind, Governor Malloy asked the legislature to reduce the penalty for possession of small amounts of marijuana to a fine and eliminate the possibility of jail. He has asked our courts to honor the longstanding state law that prioritizes violent and firearms crimes, rather than non-violent and victimless offenses. Our prisons should be reserved for dangerous offenders, not low-level drug offenders.

The most troubling racial disparity in our criminal justice system has been in the juvenile justice system. The legislature has led the way in reforming that system as part of its "Raise the Age" initiative. Despite calls by some to delay this reform, Governor Malloy has consistently supported this change and it will take full effect on schedule on July 1 of this year. Because of the many preventive and rehabilitative initiatives since 2006, there are fewer juveniles in detention and one of our state's three detention facilities was closed late last year. Recidivism among children supervised by juvenile probation officers is down 10% over the last five years and every indication is that this trend will continue.

2011 was a watershed year for many reforms designed to enhance the integrity of our entire criminal justice system. National best practices in the handling of eyewitness identifications and mandatory videotaping of interrogations of suspects in the most major crimes will be a reality in the near future. These changes will certainly result in fewer wrongful convictions. Just as important: more predators will be off the street and behind bars. Connecticut learned the painful lesson that antiquated law enforcement procedures can result in the conviction of the innocent and the failure to apprehend the real perpetrators.

At the end of the day, the criminal justice system exists to prevent crime. If we define success as less crime, then we must adopt a systemic approach. If police are disconnected from prosecutors, or mental health professionals treated as strangers in our courts, or if probation, parole and corrections officers are not directly involved in fighting and preventing crime, the system will fail. Connecticut learned this lesson the hard way in 2007, and the legislature responded by authorizing a state-of-the-art information sharing system to connect every part of the system. One of the Governor's first actions last year was to release the money set aside for this system. Once it is operational it will help us fully achieve our three goals: reducing crime, reducing spending and restoring confidence in our criminal justice system.