

Hello. I would like to thank the Judiciary Committee for hearing this bill and allowing me to give my testimony. . My name is Gahlil Oliveira and I am currently serving a Life Plus 40 years sentence at the Adult Correctional Institution. I want to express my strong support for The Sentencing Reconsideration Act. Not only am I a prime example of the type of person that this legislation may help, this bill represents a very important step toward a more equitable reform in the criminal justice system in Rhode Island.

I want to start by saying that I am truly sorry for the reckless, irresponsible and immature things that I did when I was younger and I can never take back what I did or the pain that I caused because if I could I would. I can only demonstrate and do the work that was needed to be done, in order to change and better myself as a human being, and spend the rest of my life living the right way and doing the work needed to achieve that. And that is how I've spent my time in prison. I have spent more than 29 years behind these walls. I came in at 23 and I will be 53 years old on April 13.

A couple of years ago I was denied my Post Conviction Relief application, not because the Judge didn't want to grant me relief, but merely because he couldn't, because the law doesn't allow him to. Being in front of the Judge, knowing that I have given my life to change, to helping others and doing the long hard work that it takes to become truly rehabilitated to then find out that he believes in my rehabilitation and wouldn't hesitate to give me the relief that I was asking for but can not because he doesn't have the discretion to do so.

It was a traumatic experience to find out that the decision maker couldn't legally make the decision that he wanted to make. The Judges that are respected, trusted, and entrusted to make the big decisions and give people X amount of years, should also be trusted to have the discretion to take some time away if the person has served a (substantial) amount of time, met all the requirements and, most importantly, are truly rehabilitated.

The Sentencing Reconsideration Act addresses major disparities in sentencing by allowing individuals serving outdated or disproportionately harsh sentences to seek a fair and proportionate review of their cases. The criminal justice system must evolve to reflect modern sentencing practices and ensure that individuals are not subjected to punitive measures that no longer align with most current standards of justice. By providing a mechanism for sentence review, The Sentencing Reconsideration Act acknowledges the importance of rehabilitation and second chances. Many individuals serving excessive sentences have demonstrated rehabilitation, personal growth, the proper insight, and readiness to contribute positively to society. This bill will allow for a fair assessment of their cases, reducing unnecessary incarceration, while enhancing community reintegration efforts.

Also, the Sentencing Reconsideration Act is a fiscally responsible measure. Rhode Island spends significant taxpayer dollars on incarceration costs. Allowing appropriate sentence reductions would help allocate resources more effectively, focusing on rehabilitation, reentry programs, and crime prevention initiatives rather than prolonged imprisonment.

I know that some of you may be skeptical about this bill because you worry that many people may get released because of it. That is not the case at all. Like I said earlier, Judges are respected, trusted and very smart and they will be extremely critical and cautious about who's Sentencing Reconsideration that they would even entertain. So, the few people that may get this Reconsideration that they need, will only be people that truly deserve it.

The point of prison for the most part is rehabilitative, not just punitive, so having a mechanism where (certain) people can show and prove that they have been and are rehabilitated is a valuable piece of legislation.

Thank you for your time and for allowing me to express my views on this proposed legislation and I ask that the Judiciary Committee will support The Sentencing Reconsideration Act and put it to the floor for a vote.

Once again, thank you very much.

Sincerely,
Gahlil Oliveira
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