

CCDLA
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Judiciary Committee Public Hearing
April 4, 2011

**TESTIMONY OF JENNIFER L. ZITO, PRESIDENT OF THE CONNECTICUT
CRIMINAL DEFENSE LAWYERS ASSOCIATION IN SUPPORT OF RAISED
BILL 1235, AN ACT CONCERNING THE SEXUAL OFFENDER REGISTRY**

Dear Chairman Coleman, Chairman Fox and Distinguished Members of the Judiciary Committee:

The Connecticut Criminal Defense Lawyers Association (CCDLA) supports Raised Bill 1235, **An Act Concerning the Sexual Offender Registry**, requiring assessment of sexual offenders for risk of reoffending on a tiered system, and limiting the public dissemination of the registration to moderate or high risk offenders. Connecticut's Sex Offender Registry (SOR) is in desperate need of modification and reform; it is significantly outdated and fails to adequately provide risk assessment to law enforcement and the public seeking information about registrants. The current registry has become overpopulated and diluted with a majority of registrants who pose little to no risk to the community. As a result, the registry allows those with real and substantial risk to be hidden from the focus and attention they deserve. The provisions contained in Raised Bill 1235 will provide greater protection to the community while at the same time treating lower risk offenders in a more balanced and appropriate fashion.

Connecticut is surrounded by states that have adopted a tiered level of offenders based on risk. New Jersey, New York, Massachusetts, and Rhode Island all have systems that don't overwhelm their publics and focus attention on risk. Raised Bill 1235 seeks to amend our current registry by directing the Risk Assessment Board (previously established by law but not implemented) to distinguish offenders based upon their risk of reoffending. It further seeks to keep the lowest category of offenders—those that pose a low risk of reoffending—off the public registry; they will continue to be registered just not publicly.

Page 2

April 4, 2011

CCDLA Testimony Raised Bill 1235

While CCDLA supports this bill it also urges this Committee to consider amending it to affirmatively provide for periodic reassessment of offenders to allow registrants to drop risk levels at the Risk Assessment Board's discretion over time. CCDLA also proposes amendment to allow lifetime registrants, after a 10 year period, to petition the court for removal from the SOR if they have satisfactorily complied with all of its conditions and are no longer deemed by the Risk Assessment Board to pose a risk to the community. These provisions will adequately tailor the public registry to reflect the true offenders who pose a risk to the community.

On January 5, 2011, the Department of Public Safety released the State Police statistics for the 2010 calendar year for the SOR putting the total number of registered sex offenders in our State at 5,231. Only 180 registrants have been dropped from the SOR having completed their 10 year registration, while 339 new registered sex offenders were added. These numbers are simply going to multiply with the requirement of additional lifetime registrations. State police are overwhelmed in trying to manage the SOR and, as presently structured, are unable to delineate high risk offenders from low risk offenders. This has become an untenable situation in Connecticut necessitating the proposal contained in Raised Bill 1235. Providing a more discerning SOR will not only save money ultimately, but will also best protect the public without unnecessarily prejudicing low risk offenders.

Respectfully submitted,

The Connecticut Criminal Defense Lawyers Association
Jennifer L. Zito, President