



State of Connecticut
DIVISION OF PUBLIC DEFENDER SERVICES

OFFICE OF CHIEF PUBLIC DEFENDER
30 TRINITY STREET - 4th Floor
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106

DEBORAH DEL PRETE SULLIVAN
LEGAL COUNSEL, DIRECTOR
(860) 509-6405 Telephone
(860) 509-6495 Fax
deborah.d.sullivan@jud.ct.gov

Testimony of
Ernest Green, Senior Assistant Public Defender,
Office of Chief Public Defender

Judiciary Public Hearing - March 23, 2015
Bill No. 1114 - An Act Concerning the Commission on
Racial and Ethnic Disparity in the Criminal Justice System

The Office of Chief Public Defender supports passage of *Bill No. 1114 An Act Concerning the Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparity in the Criminal Justice System*. As attorneys appointed to represent the indigent, Connecticut Public Defenders have worked in and against the atmosphere of disparity that pervades the Criminal Justice System. Our Agency has made efforts to educate ourselves, our colleagues and our courts about the intersection of race/ ethnicity and poverty, and have supported efforts to identify, reduce and eliminate explicit and implicit biases that affect the administration of justice in our state. Public Defenders have actively participated in the work of the Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparity in the Criminal Justice System and have joined in that work because of the importance of the issues that the Commission was created to address.

The goals that have been set for the Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparity in the Criminal Justice pursuant to § 51-10c of the General Statutes are important ones. In actual practice, however, a number of individual mandates of § 51-10c have proven overly burdensome to a Commission with a small budget and volunteer staff. The Commission now seeks to change its statutory charge without diluting the overall goal of reducing disparity in the administration of justice through a narrowed focus on manageable and measurable objectives. The Office of Chief Public Defender believes that the newly focused charge will enhance the work of the Commission by clarifying what actually can and must be accomplished. Through a renewed focus on education and advocacy, the Commission can be an important agent of change while acting within time and budgetary constraints. Additionally, expansion of its membership and revision of its charge will also make the Commission more efficient and effective. A more streamlined approach will assist the Commission as it works to illuminate areas of disparate treatment, and identify procedures and practices that can eliminate both explicit and implicit biases, and improve the experience of all those involved in the Criminal Justice System. There is ample room for heightened awareness of rights and realities. The proposed statutory revision will facilitate and enhance the work of the Commission as it moves the system of justice in Connecticut towards greater equity and fairness.

Therefore, the Office of Chief Public Defender respectfully requests that the Judiciary Committee act favorably upon Raised Bill SB –1114.