

## House Republican Press Release

September 6, 2007  
Press Office: 860-240-8700

### Republican Legislative Leaders Call for Special Session to Strengthen Connecticut's



Hartford, CT – Senate Republican Leader John McKinney (R-Fairfield) and House Republican Leader Lawrence Cafero (R-Norwalk) today introduced a comprehensive package of legislative reforms aimed at toughening jail sentences on Connecticut's most serious repeat offenders.

The Republican leaders again called on Senate President Don Williams and House Speaker Jim Amann to convene a special session of the General Assembly no later than October 23 to strengthen Connecticut's persistent offender laws, reclassify burglary of a residence as a violent crime, fix the state's parole processes, and enact a true Three Strikes policy – one that eliminates judicial discretion and requires life imprisonment for a third serious felony conviction.

“Connecticut has a reprehensible record when it comes to keeping career criminals locked up,” **said Senator McKinney**. “With most of the legislature in agreement on the major reforms necessary to make our state safer, there is no reason the General Assembly should wait to act. We need to vote on these reforms now.”

The Republican leaders cited Tuesday's state Supreme Court decision, which found part of Connecticut's current persistent offender law to be unconstitutional, as further evidence that the state's laws pertaining to career criminals need to change now.

“The Connecticut Supreme Court's unanimous decision to strike down portions of what was already a deeply flawed persistent felon statute requires immediate response from the legislature. The court provided clear direction on just how to address the portions of the current law that it found unconstitutional. We also need to reform our parole system and we can do both those things in special session this fall,” **said Representative Cafero**.

He added, “There is near universal agreement on the areas that must be addressed so that we have a workable, effective ‘Three Strikes’ law. The time to act is now.”

Tuesday's Supreme Court decision ordered that the jury, not the judge, decide if Arnold Bell, a lifetime criminal most recently convicted of assault for shooting a New Haven police officer, be required to serve a longer sentence.

“It’s an embarrassment for the state of Connecticut, when a series of trials and an appearance in Supreme Court isn’t enough to determine a proper jail sentence for a dangerous criminal who had a twenty-year history of felony convictions and whose latest offense was shooting a police officer in the face,” **said Senator McKinney**.

“Tuesday’s Supreme Court decision demonstrates that, not only are Connecticut’s persistent offender laws permissive and rarely used, but until this week, our courts were not even sure who had the power to enhance sentences on repeat criminals in the first place,” **said Senator McKinney**. As a result, Connecticut is routinely granting light sentences and early parole to career criminals who commit serious felonies over and over again. It must stop.”

He added, “The Supreme Court is not at fault here. Connecticut’s current laws and treatment of career criminals are the problem in that they don’t go far enough to protect the public.”

Senator McKinney has on two previous occasions (July 31 and August 17) written Senator Williams and Speaker Amann to request a special session to address these issues. Neither legislative leader responded to his appeals.

## ***Change the Laws ~ Change the System***

*Republican Legislative Leaders introduced the following proposals today to strengthen Connecticut's laws and parole processes pertaining to dangerous career criminals.*

*The legislative leaders are calling for a special session to vote on their proposals.*

### **CHANGE THE LAWS**

1. **Enact a Strong Three Strikes Law** that eliminates judicial discretion and requires life imprisonment for a third serious felony conviction, keeping career criminals in jail and out of our neighborhoods.
2. **Reclassify Burglary of a Residence (Home Invasion) as a Violent Crime**
  - a. Force dangerous felons who commit this crime to serve 85% of their jail sentences before applying for parole (under current law, the majority of these criminals are released after serving only half of their sentences).
  - b. Impose a mandatory minimum 5-year prison sentence on criminals convicted of burglary in the first or second degree.
3. **Strengthen Connecticut's Persistent Offender Law** by following the state Supreme Court's recommendation to grant juries the power to determine enhanced sentences on criminals they deem to be dangerous persistent offenders.

### **CHANGE THE SYSTEM**

1. **Reform the State's Parole Process**
  - a. Transfer the Board of Parole from the Dept. of Corrections to the Dept. of Public Safety
  - b. Increase membership on the Board of Parole
  - c. Require transcripts and other information pertaining to a candidate for parole be provided to Board of Parole members at least three business days prior to the candidate's hearing
  - d. Require released offenders to report to their local police station to be photographed and documented within one week of their release
  - e. Require more information on the court record at the time of sentencing
2. **Require Serious Criminals to Wear GPS Tracking Devices** on their person at all times as a condition of their release.