

July 8, 2008

## **Gomes Meets with Connecticut Pardon Team Members**

### **State pardon process provides a second chance for those who deserve it**

State Sen. Edwin A. Gomes (D-Bridgeport) met today with members of the non-profit Connecticut Pardon Team, Inc. and one of their clients in advance of Thursday's informational session at the Harrison Apartments that will tell former inmates about Connecticut's pardon process and how it can change their lives.

Sen. Gomes met today with Pardon Team founder Jackie Caron and her husband, Pardon Team Executive Director Richard A. Caron, Sr., as well as with Pardon Team Legal Advisor Attorney Linda J. Sullivan and with Norraine McQueen, a mother of eight who received her pardon in June for the drug-related crime she committed 18 years ago as a teenager.

"Eighteen years ago--that person that I was I am not anymore," McQueen said. "I am a mother, I'm off welfare, I'm working, I'm taking care of my kids. I deserve this. It's all about getting a second chance."

Sen. Gomes said he hopes the Pardon Team can bring its message of hope and redemption to a wider audience when it holds its second informational session in a month at the Harrison Apartments at 651 State Street on Thursday, July 10, from 6 to 8 p.m.

"I've heard amazing stories about people who have turned their lives around after a criminal conviction," Sen. Gomes said. "But how are you ever going to turn your life around if you're not given a second chance? Without the possibility of a pardon, you're condemning a lot of people to repeating the same mistakes time and time again because they can't land a job and move forward with their lives. The Connecticut Pardon team helps people do that. I'm all for giving people second chances."

"There are a fair number of folks in Bridgeport who have messed up and committed a crime. But just because they committed a crime, it shouldn't follow them around for life," said state Rep. Andres Ayala, Jr. (D-Bridgeport), who also attended today's meeting. This is about second chances, and giving someone the opportunity to be successful in life."

The Connecticut Pardon Team, Inc. ([www.connecticutpardonteam.org](http://www.connecticutpardonteam.org)) is a non-profit organization headquartered in Norwich that provides the information people need to change their lives if they were formerly convicted of a crime, have successfully completed their parole or probation, have made significant steps toward rebuilding their lives, are taking a proactive role in giving back to their communities, and who have remained conviction-free for the term as prescribed by law (3 years

for a misdemeanor, 5 years for a felony).

"My goal in creating the Connecticut Pardon Team was to educate and advocate," said Jackie Caron, who received her state pardon in 2001 and who has since gone on to serve as an alderwoman on the Norwich City Council and to work for the Connecticut State Legislature. "I believe that if someone has committed a crime, has done their time and paid their dues, the question then becomes, how long is enough? How long do we make them pay?"

"A lot of people we work with have turned their lives around and are ready to move forward. But they are afraid to advance," said Richard Caron, who received a state pardon in 2005. "I am working right now with two corrections officers and a police officer who won't put in for captain or sergeant. They're afraid of having their records re-opened. They are being held back because of one or two felonies that occurred when they were young and foolish."

"What we have seen in recent years is a whole shifting away in the criminal justice system from rehabilitation to incarceration and retribution," said Atty. Sullivan, who has been a criminal defense attorney for 28 years. "What the Pardon Team does is shift the focus back toward the rehabilitation aspect, and that has the possibility of transforming people's lives."

Mario Sarro, a program specialist in the Champions Mentoring Program of Bridgeport Family Reentry, Inc., which helps individuals transition from incarceration back into their communities, said "nothing else can offer the kind of hope that the Connecticut Pardon Team can offer" with the opportunity to have a criminal conviction erased from one's records.

"I talk to a lot of guys who just got out. The possibility of a pardon offers hope," Sarro said. "I have seen lives change. You can actually go to school. You can actually have a family. You can actually have a job. You should see the light come on when I tell people that. Because now they have hope."