

AN ACT CONCERNING CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECKS FOR EMPLOYEES OF HOMEMAKER-COMPANION AGENCIES AND HOME HEALTH AGENCIES.

Good morning, members of the committee. My name is Allison Polesel, I am from Avon, and I am a student at the University of Connecticut - School of Social Work. Today I am testifying in support of An Act Concerning Criminal Background Checks for Employees of Homemaker-Companion Agencies and Home Health Agencies.

As a direct care staff in a group home for adolescent girls requiring out of home care, I went through an application for employment process that required me to submit to both a comprehensive background check and a drug test. Part of this position includes bringing young clients on supervised home visits. The reason for this is because we work in close proximity to clients who make the group home their home for the duration on treatment and the safety of clients in the home needs to be ensured. Elderly clients who seek in-home care and services should be afforded the same safeties when having care workers into their homes.

It is the right of the elderly client seeking the services of homemaker-companion agencies to feel safe and secure in the place they call home. Recognizing this, it is the duty of the agency supplying the service to ensure this peace of mind by hiring employees that have no potential of infringing on this feeling of security for their clients.

By requiring comprehensive background checks for workers that enter their clients' homes, it reduces risk to the organization and it ensures a safer work environment for employees.

While opponents of this bill may feel that such background checks encourage discrimination, the bill accounts for this on the part that no home health agency shall deny employment to any applicant solely because of a prior conviction of a crime – unless the agency determines that such applicant is not suitable for the position of employment sought based on a review by the agency of the nature of the crime and its relationship to the position. It also accounts for the possibility of rehabilitation of the applicant and the amount of time elapsed since the conviction. It protects the applicant from discrimination by forbidding the use and distribution of an applicant's arrest record if there is no conviction.

While I support the bill, I would like to see how the law will be funded, implemented and monitored. If this law makes it the duty of the agency to carry out interviews and background checks, who is going to hold the agencies to the law and what will it cost the agency to do so? That aside, this bill is pretty standard protocol for those who work in fields of service, for instance, that of a group home staff. It should be passed as a law to ensure safety on all parties, client and service provider, due to the nature of the work that puts the professionals inside the home of a client.

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