

Judiciary Committee: Public Hearing March 23, 2012

Raised Bill No. 453 – An Act Concerning Certificates of Relief from Barriers Resulting from Conviction of a Crime

Testimony of Scott C. Bertrand

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Scott C. Bertrand and I am the Executive Director of the Enfield Housing Authority where I have worked for over ten years. I am also a Past President of the Connecticut Chapter of the National Association of Housing & Redevelopment Officials more commonly known as CONN-NAHRO.

I oppose Raised Bill No. 453 – An Act Concerning Certificates of Relief from Barriers Resulting from Conviction of a Crime

While this Bill is likely well intended, I believe it will greatly hinder a public housing authority's ability to screen an applicant based on their past criminal history. The legislation will grant any superior court judge and also Board of Pardons and Paroles the power to insert ex-offenders into public housing regardless of applicant's prior convictions. This will likely negatively impact housing for the elderly and moderate income families. Local public housing authorities have a clear responsibility to the existing residents to provide a safe living environment. A review of an applicant's prior criminal behavior is a critical part of the screening process.

It is important to note that a prior conviction does not automatically result in a denial of housing. The current statute has adequate protections in place for applicants as housing authorities must give consideration as follows:

"In evaluating any such information, the housing authority shall give consideration to the time, nature and extent of the applicant's or proposed occupant's conduct and to factors which might indicate a reasonable probability of favorable future conduct such as evidence of rehabilitation and evidence of willingness of the applicant, the applicant's family or proposed occupant to participate in social service or other appropriate counseling programs and the availability of such programs."

Applicants who are denied housing are offered an informal hearing where they may present evidence of the above.

Under the proposed legislation housing authorities being presented a Certificate of Relief from Barriers will be required accept the document as presumed eligibility that the applicant is suitable for housing. This greatly reduces the decision making ability of the local jurisdiction.

I strongly encourage you to oppose this legislation.

Respectfully submitted:



Scott C. Bertrand