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**Written Testimony of Alexis Smith
New Haven Legal Assistance Association
In Support of SB 153, AAC The Recommendations of the Connecticut Sentencing
Commission With Respect to Certificates of Rehabilitation**

My name is Alexis Smith and I am an attorney at New Haven Legal Assistance Association. I am here on behalf of Connecticut's Legal Services Programs to testify in support of SB 153, which grants the Board of Pardons and Paroles the authority to grant a certificate of relief for any offense against the state at any time after the imposition and before or after service of any sentence. Our programs provide free legal services to low income residents throughout the state of Connecticut. We represent formerly incarcerated persons in a variety of civil matters.

As of January 2013 there were approximately 16,913 individuals incarcerated in Connecticut prisons. The vast majority of these men and women will reenter society at some point, in search of employment, housing, and other life sustaining benefits. However, a criminal record is a tremendous barrier to securing all of these.

The State Board of Pardons and Paroles has created a thorough application process to allow eligible individuals the opportunity to erase their criminal records through an expungement. The Board also utilizes the provisional pardons process for individuals the Board feels have not shown the rehabilitation level to achieve a full expungement. SB 153, much like the provisional pardon, provides the Board with another alternative for individuals in need of a relief to the barriers of a criminal record but who may not yet be ready for a full pardon.

Successful reentry is often hampered by the various barriers a criminal record produces, which can ultimately lead to recidivism. In fact, a recent study conducted by the State Criminal Justice Policy and Planning Division of the Office of Policy and Management followed 14,398 male sentenced offenders after their release or discharge in 2005. Within five years of release 79% were re-arrested; 69% were convicted of a new crime and 50% returned to prison with a new sentence. People with criminal records rely on the pardons process as an avenue to fully leave their criminal history behind and secure a bright future. While a Certificate of Relief would not erase one's record, it does demonstrate the Board's recognition that the individual has made efforts to rehabilitate herself and move beyond her criminal record. A Certificate of Relief could also serve as a stepping stone to achieving a full pardon which is the ultimate demonstration of rehabilitation.