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Testimony of Reginald "Reggie" Beamon
To
The Committee on Public Safety and Security in
Support of H.B.5924
Thursday, February 5, 2015
LOB Hartford, CT

Begin:

Co-Chairs, Representative Dargan and Senator Larson, Ranking Members, Senator
Gugliemo and Representative Zupkus, Honorable members, especially Representatives
Orange, Boukus Esposito and my good friends Representative D'amelio, and Senator
Coleman...

For the record, I am Reggie Beamon of Waterbury, returning to what I considered home
for twenty years...and in some ways a bit overwhelmed after an eight year absence.

Yes, Representative Dargan I truly miss our debates over many sessions and specifically
our first two hour debate on the issue being heard today.

I come to Hartford to express my support for House Bill 5924, sponsored by Representative Hewett and Senator Coleman.

Currently I am the Executive Director of a life skills, jobs training non-profit, and I also have had the honor of teaching "State and Local Government" over the past ten years. Throughout these years, the issue of H.B. 5924 has been a continuing concern and the focus of one of the lectures during the semester. That lecture is dedicated to how the Legislature makes and changes rules and deadlines. H.B 5924 has been drafted to address the late lottery ticket claim of Clarence Jackson. As it is a function of the

Legislative process to change various aspects of governing, the Jackson concern has even found its way as an essay question on the final exam.

With regard to H.B. 5924, as the committee has cognizance for "all matters concerning legalized gaming", the placement of this concern to address a specific narrow issue does not minimize the implications of a much broader public policy, on extensions of time which should be debated in both Chambers.

As veteran committee members are aware, this concern has had almost a twenty year life.

Mr. Jackson went to the lottery, then to court and was told to come to the Legislature. On

three occasions the House has passed similar amendments as the proposed bill. The House

actions never made for debate in the Senate, as individual senators framed this concern as

one of the "rules are the rules" along

with other concerns that narrowly focused on the rules of the lottery and not the broader

issue of extension of time.

Over the years, hundreds of rule changes for extensions of time have been made for corporations, municipalities and individuals. In each of the twenty years I served here, our Legislature has voted in favor of extending time for the above noted, without any, if I can recall negative votes in the House. In my lecture, I note many of the specific instances of how and why extensions of time have been granted. For example, on June 8, 2011, former Representative Patricia Widlitz, Chair of Finance, introduced the annual 'Fail to File' bill, to provide extensions of time to file for property tax exemptions.

Former Representative Michael Lawlor in the 1997 Floor debate on this issue noted, "The Legislature frequently grants special exemptions for corporations and municipalities that miss deadlines" Lawlor continued, "People say we can't change rules, that's all we do here is change the rules".

Therein lies my dilemma and very long commitment to this issue. These opponents craft an argument of personal responsibility and the rules, while not embracing and ignoring the broader policy of who and why extensions are granted. With regard to a lottery extension or rule change, so many states have changed their rules to accommodate various circumstances, and awarded prizes (New York, Illinois, Maryland and Ohio).

Members, this will be the first time I will note the following: Over the history, I never used a quote in debates by the late Senator Alvin Penn which troubled me. Penn's quote, did not address the broader issue. According to the Hartford Courant, when asked after

the last public hearing and first vote in the House, Lynn Bixby wrote on June 4, 1997, "He said that racial considerations have played a part in his position that the Legislature should not bend the rules. Both he and Jackson are black", Penn's quote, "I usually find myself advocating for the underdog, but this is about responsibility... if I compromise myself based on my feelings, people would say he did it because (Jackson is) black or because he is poor". The article continued, "that perception Penn said, 'could damage his effectiveness as

one of the state's three black Senators'". The Boston Globe also reported and editorialized,

"So if Jackson was white, Penn would break the rules"?

The late Senator and I had many conversations on this concern, his responses and his

"feelings" prior to his demise. They were as lively as our debates, Representative Dargan.

The making of public policy should, on this concern, have nothing to do with race, income,

feelings and/or perception. This is about a fair process.

There are so many themes as former Representative Sean Williams was quoted, "whether

or not you feel bad for Clarence Jackson or whether or not you feel he got a raw deal is

immaterial because the fact that there is a huge hypocrisy here...this is an injustice in the

sense that each and every year, here in this building, we change rules and extend deadlines

for all sorts of people".

I urge your committee to JF H.B. 5924 to the floor for what columnist Stan Simpson wrote

in his column in February 2008 to, "Give the Man a Vote".

Thank you. I would be honored to answer any questions of members...and it's good to be
back.