



# State of Connecticut COMMISSION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND OPPORTUNITIES

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*Promoting Equality and Justice for all People*

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## Testimony to the Judiciary Committee Friday, March 20, 2015

### **HB 5437, AN ACT CONCERNING THE ALVIN W. PENN RACIAL PROFILING PROHIBITION ACT**

The Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities **SUPPORTS HB 5437**, AN ACT CONCERNING THE ALVIN W. PENN RACIAL PROFILING PROHIBITION ACT.

We see evidence of discrimination across our society. Whether it is in fraternities, local education funding, income and unemployment or restrictive voting initiatives it is here and it is real. And when we say here let us remember the four East Haven police officers convicted of federal charges of violating the civil rights of Latinos in East Haven.

Sen. Penn authored this law after being stopped by a white police officer who refused to tell him why he had been pulled over. And evidence continues to mount that policing is not colorblind even here in Connecticut where CCSU's Institute for Municipal & Regional Policy produced an initial report that minorities were being disproportionately pulled over.

Access to a legal remedy when one has been victimized by profiling is essential to the residents of Connecticut. Thankfully this state was home to a remarkable senator for whom this bill is named and who was a champion for civil rights legislation like this act. Senator Alvin Penn was a great legislator who represented Bridgeport from 1993 – 2003 until cancer struck him down at only 54. While he is remembered today through the Alvin W. Penn Act we would like to remind people that Sen. Penn was about much more than traffic stops; he attacked discrimination in all its forms. He revamped the state witness protection program when, in Bridgeport, witnesses were killed by drug dealers before they could testify in a murder trial. He was an opponent of an initiative transferring prisoners from Connecticut to Virginia to ease overcrowding which disproportionately affected minorities. He cast the only no vote on the 2001 budget because of its cuts to the poor. He walked the walk.

The Commission would like to suggest one improvement to the bill. In Section 1, the Commission asks that the Committee replace the current language with the following:

(e) In addition to alleging a violation of section 46a-64, any person who believes that he or she has been the victim of racial profiling in violation of this section, or that such person's rights under subsection (a) or subdivision (2) of subsection (b) of section 54-1m has been violated, may file a complaint with the commission on human rights and opportunities under section 46a-82. Information about how to contact the commission on human rights shall be provided to motor vehicle operators in English and Spanish after all traffic stops.

The Commission believes that this change is necessary to reflect the current state of the law.

The Commission supports this bill and all measure that aid in furthering the work of Sen. Alvin Penn.