Testimony of Dennis
In Opposition to Raised Bill No. 1087, before the Judiciary Committee
And in Support of Reforming the Sex Offender Registry Laws in Connecticut
March 16, 2014

I am no threat to society, none at all. I would never harm you, your wife or daughters, or any other person in this world. My girlfriend now, of the past 13 years, who was raped in her past, knows my whole story, and says she feels totally safe with me. Most people in my building say I'm the nicest man they ever met. I want you to know my story so that you know I am not a threat, never have been and never will be. And there are other people like me, who should not have to be on the sex offender registry. That is why I have come here today, to ask you to change the laws regarding the sex offender registry, so that people who are not a danger or a threat, and can prove that this is the case, should not have to be on it.

Here is how I came to be on the lifetime sex offender registry. Back in 1987, I was married but separated from my wife. I started seeing another woman. Then me and my wife decided to get back together, and I told the other woman that me and my wife were getting back together and that I was therefore ending my relationship with her. First she was mad; but then she asked me to stay and have one last night with her. I did, and the next day we parted and I went back to my wife. That was the last I saw of her, that night, and we parted on good terms as far as I knew.

A few months later, the police came to my job and arrested me. They said that my former girlfriend had accused me of rape, and had evidence and bruises supposedly caused by me. I never raped her, never harmed her or cut her, and any sexual relationship I had with her was totally consensual. But I guess she was mad because I had left her.

I had a public defender appointed to me, and told him what had happened. Although I did not agree that I had done anything wrong, he convinced me and my wife that it would be better to take a plea and serve a shorter sentence, than to risk a trial and a possible 40 year sentence. I therefore entered into a plea agreement, and served 4 and a half years in jail, was granted parole the first time I applied, and was on probation for approximately 3 years after. I have never had any arrest or conviction for any sex related or violent crime before or since then.

That was back in 1987. At that time, there was no sex offender registry. I had no idea that by entering into that plea agreement, I would years later be put on the sex offender registry, and be put on it for life. Had I known that, and the problems and stigma it would cause me for the rest of my life, I would never have taken the plea.

Being on the sex offender register really affected me badly in my housing situation. A few years ago, I was taking care of my uncle Edgar, who was elderly and had a lot of health problems. Every day I went to feed him and bathe him; and his sister and my mother asked me if I would move in with him, to take care of him full time. I agreed to do so, gave up my own apartment and moved into his public housing apartment in New Haven. I reported this to the housing authority, and gave them all my income information so they could put me on the lease. I lived with him for three years, until his condition worsened, he went into hospice care, and ultimately passed away. While he was in hospice, I got a letter from the housing authority saying that the apartment had been abandoned, and they were going to board it up. I went to legal aid for help. My lawyer told the Housing Authority that I was still living there and had provided all the information to be added to the lease; and that I was also entitled to stay there as a remaining member of Edgar's family.

The Housing Authority probably would have signed a new lease with me in my own name; but then they discovered I was on the sex offender registry. That's when the trouble began. Under HUD rules, they could not rent to me because I was on the sex offender registry. Even though I gave them testimonials from all my neighbors about what a good neighbor I was, and showed that I wasn't a threat to anybody, they would not sign the lease with me or give me an apartment. After years of litigation, my public defender and my legal aid lawyer were able to work out an agreement with the prosecutor, the head of the registry, and the Judge, to remove me from the public registry. This allowed the Housing Authority to rent me an apartment. But I am still on the police's registry, have to send in my card every 90 days, and will have to do so for the rest of my life.

Here is how being on the registry has affected me. I can't really get close to people, because I'm afraid they'll find out I am on the registry, and I don't want them judging me. You wake up every day and wonder who's going to find out. And to judge me, and you don't really know me as a person, I think it's wrong. But that's what happens when you're on the sex offender registry, if someone knows I'm on there automatically they judge me. They don't feel safe. I don't want anybody fearing me. I've got love in my heart, I'm not going to harm anyone. Everyday it's a struggle, wondering how my day is going to be; is this the day that someone is going to find out that I'm on there? I think about it a lot. At one point it got so bad I was ready to commit suicide: I felt worthless, useless, that's how I really felt, why keep going, no one is going to accept me because I've got this stigma hanging on me. I'm a little relieved now, because I'm in housing. So that's one aspect of my life I don't have to deal with now, I have a roof over my head, I pay my bills, I don't create no problem over there. But I still worry every day if someone is going to find out and start talking about me, and next thing you know everyone would be staying away from me. That is what has happened to other people who are

on the registry, and are labeled, and then they are ostracized. That's no life, and I'm still afraid every day of that happening to me.

One thing I know about people being on the registry: they can't get housing. They can't get a job. Nobody will hire them. Or if they're hired and then the employer finds out, then they are fired. I know people in that situation. How do you maintain your sanity? It's enough to send you over the edge: you've got nowhere to go, you can't get a job. So how are you supposed to survive? You're putting us on the street with nothing. That's enough to make someone put a rope around your neck and say the heck with it. I've been there, I know. You feel helpless, useless, you feel like you're nobody. It's a bad feeling; an empty, empty feeling. Nobody wants you. And it's even worse, if your family thinks the same as everybody else thinks. I'm lucky: my family, they know me and what kind of person I am, and they never changed in their love for me. But not everyone on the registry has that kind of luxury and support. For some, the parents and siblings don't want to have anything to do with them.

I know a guy in that situation, and I keep talking to him, telling him not to give up. He is homeless, because the last place he was living in, where he was renting in West Haven, found out he was on the registry and evicted him. So now he is living on the street. When he gets any money, he will rent a room in a hotel to have somewhere to stay, and when it runs out, then he's living on the street. I try to help him out as much as I can with soap, deodorant. I really feel for him; and I see what he's going through and I can relate to it, I know the feeling. He's a good person; he made a mistake, and he admits he did it, and he did his time. He is not a threat to anyone either. But with this stigma on him, he has no way to make a life. He was fired from his job at McDonald's when they found out he was on the registry. He had lied on his application, because otherwise he would never have gotten the job. One of the other employees found him on the registry and told the boss, and then he was fired. They want you to go out there and live productively, and how can you do that, when you have so much against you?

People who have killed people come out and get jobs; but if you are on the sex offender registry, you ain't getting nothing. They treat that worse than a murderer.

I think that Connecticut's laws about the sex offender registry should be reviewed. Everyone on there should not be on there for a lifetime. How much time do you have to do to say that your debt is paid? It's like having a life sentence, the only difference is you're not in jail. You have no freedom, can't leave the state, and you live with this stigma hanging over you. I don't think people should have to be on there forever. If they can prove that they are not a threat to society, why should they be on there? They should have a chance to live a normal life, working and getting housing, without having to look over their shoulder. Emotionally, it drains you, not to know every day if you're going to be alright, and living with the fear every day that

someone will find out and will use it against you. It's a bad situation to be in; and people don't realize what stigma they put on you by keeping you on the registry. I feel like I'm still doing time; and I shouldn't feel like that. I feel like people should be able to get off the registry, and remove that stigma, when they are not a danger. Everybody that's on there is not a threat to public safety, and they shouldn't have to be on there.