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## **Written Testimony Supporting House Bill 5237, An Act Concerning Fair Chance Employment**

Senator Gomes, Representative Tercyak, and members of the Employment and Public Employees Committee. My name is David McGuire, and I am the Legislative and Policy Director for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am submitting this testimony in support of House Bill 5237, An Act Concerning Fair Chance Employment.

The ACLU of Connecticut strongly believes in justice and equality for all. We therefore strongly support House Bill 5237, because it would ensure that people who make mistakes are not unjustly sentenced to a life of exclusion and poverty. For the past two years, Connecticut has strived to create a modern, national model for criminal justice, rightfully earning public and legislative support and praise. This bill offers another chance to do just that, as it offers more people in our state a true second chance.

The Fair Chance Employment Act will remove roadblocks to employment for people with criminal records by ensuring that employers first evaluate job candidates based on skills and qualifications, not past mistakes. House Bill 5237 would move questions about criminal history to later in the hiring process and require private employers to follow the same rules as public employers when asking about criminal history. As a result, this bill will help to mitigate racial disparities in our criminal justice system, make Connecticut safer and more prosperous, and uphold the Constitution's promise of justice and equality for all.

Many employers automatically screen out applicants who check the box indicating they have a criminal record on initial applications, making it extremely challenging for individuals with criminal records to successfully reintegrate into society. Evidence shows, however, that employers are more likely to offer someone with a criminal record a fair chance at a job if they have the chance to review that application's qualifications before asking about criminal history. This bill would hold Connecticut to that standard.

Because racial minorities are nearly three times more likely to have a criminal record than their white peers, discriminatory hiring practices based on criminal record also disproportionately harm African Americans and Latinos. House Bill 5237 is therefore a modest step toward remediating the long-term consequences of Connecticut's flawed and racially unbalanced criminal justice system.