



# State of Connecticut

## Latino and Puerto Rican Affairs Commission

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## Testimony of Werner Oyanadel, LPRAC Executive Director before the Labor & Employees Committee in support of Raised HB 5237 “An Act Concerning Fair Chance Employment” March 3, 2016 – 4:00 PM at Hill Regional Career High School

Senator Gomes and Representative Tercyak and distinguished members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee, my name is Werner Oyanadel, Executive Director of the Connecticut General Assembly’s (CGA) Latino & Puerto Rican Affairs Commission. Thank you for this opportunity to provide testimony today in support of Raised HB 5237 “An Act Concerning Fair Chance Employment.”

The purpose of HB 5237 is to prevent employers from requiring certain employees or prospective employees to disclose any criminal history until the employer has made a conditional offer of employment to such employee or prospective employee.

HB 5237 is of paramount importance to LPRAC because 25 percent of the incarcerated population in Connecticut is of Latino descent, but account for only 13 percent of the state’s adult population. Put another way, Latinos are nearly twice as likely to be incarcerated in Connecticut. Furthermore, Connecticut has the 3rd highest unemployment rate in the U.S. for Latinos at 11.8 percent. This is due in-part to the disproportionate number of Latinos being sent to prison and the difficulty ex-offenders have in finding work after they complete their sentence. In fact, employers are more likely to give a job interview to a White applicant with a prison record than to a Latino who has never been to prison. For Latino ex-offenders, getting that first in-the-door job interview is even more elusive.

Again, HB 5237 – if adopted by the CGA – prohibits employers from asking about a job applicant's criminal record before granting them an interview, which creates a more leveled playing field for ex-offenders to get an initial interview. HB 5237 merely moves the criminal background check to later in the hiring process but in doing so it will help ensure people with convictions have a better chance to get hired, become self-sufficient, and most importantly to LPRAC also help reduce the risks of re-offense. In 2010, Connecticut adopted a Ban-the-Box (i.e., a new CT policy aimed to remove from their hiring applications the check box that asks if applicants have a criminal record) for state employees (C.G.S. § 46a-80). As of September 2015, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, New Jersey, and four other states prohibit both public and private-sector employers from asking about an applicant's criminal record before granting an interview.

LPRAC, for the record, is a nonpartisan policy agency within the legislative branch of government created in 1994 by an act of the Connecticut Legislature (i.e., P.A. 94-152, amended by P.A. 03-229 and amended by P.A. 09-07). Under Public Act 09-07, LPRAC consists of 21 appointed community leaders that are mandated to advise the Connecticut General Assembly and the Governor on policies that foster progress in the Latino communities residing in Connecticut.