



Testimony from Werner Oyanadel, Senior Commission Analyst for the Commission on Equity & Opportunity ~ Thursday, March 2nd, 2017 ~ LOB Room 1C – 10:00 AM

In support of Raised H.B. No. 7146 “An Act Requiring Criminal Conviction for Certain Offenses Before Assets Seized in a Lawful Arrest of Lawful Search May Be Forfeited in a Civil Proceeding.” & Raised H.B. No. 7144 “An Act Providing for Martin Luther King Corridors.”

Good morning Senators Winfield, Martin, and Rep. Lesser and all honorable members of the *Banking Committee* of the Connecticut General Assembly (CGA). My name is Subira Gordon and I am the Executive Director for the CGA’s Commission on Equity and Opportunity (CEO). I am here today speak in support of Raised H.B. No. 7146 “An Act Requiring Criminal Conviction for Certain Offenses Before Assets Seized in a Lawful Arrest of Lawful Search May Be Forfeited in a Civil Proceeding”, H.B 7030 AN ACT PROTECTING THE CREDIT OF CERTAIN UTILITY CUSTOMERS & Raised H.B. No. 7144 “An Act Providing for Martin Luther King Corridors.”

For the record, and for those that may be watching this proceedings online or via CTN in Connecticut, the mission of the CEO is to inform and engage all policy makers about constituent needs for the African American, Asian American, Pacific Islanders, and Latino and Puerto Rican populations in Connecticut. The General Assembly created it exactly for this purpose, which better ensures all lawmakers have all perspectives analyzed before they vote on legislation here in Hartford. We are a nonpartisan agency with a data driven, cross-cultural approach to policy innovation and our primary focus – again – is to recommend legislation that aims at eliminating disparities by creating opportunities, building connections and promoting social change.

Civil forfeiture laws pose great threats to property rights in the United States and are Unconstitutional based on the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which is why CEO supports passage H.B. No. 7146 to require a criminal conviction before assets may be forfeited to the state in civil proceedings. This topic is of extreme importance to our agency considering that current research shows that people of color and those who can’t afford to fight the government in court are the ones who bear the heaviest burden. As with any other issue dealing criminal justice there is disproportionate minority impact for those who are getting their assets frozen due to the high rate of contact for the monitory population with the police. Specifically this bill requires there to be a conviction before assets can be frozen along with a due process proceedings for those who have had their assets frozen.

For example, based on data released last year by the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) The vast majority (85%) of the proceeds of federal asset forfeiture in California goes to agencies that police communities that are majority people of color; Half of DEA seizures from California involved people with Latino surnames; Counties with higher per capita seizure rates have an annual household income below the state median; and the number of California law enforcement agencies taking advantage of federal civil asset forfeiture laws has increased from 200 to 232 in just the last two years. Asset forfeiture laws, according to the ACLU report, were supposed to target drug “kingpins” during the height of the war on drugs – a.k.a. the war on low income people



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of color – by confiscating their cash and property. Instead, these laws have been abused by those who have a financial incentive to take money and property from defendants even when they haven't done anything wrong.

We also offer our full support behind HB 7144 which aims at creating the Martin Luther King Corridor which will be a designated area in a targeted investment community. As this bill moves through the session we would like to continue to work with the committee to ensure that the state is creating economic incentives in regions of the state where a high proportion of the African American, Latino and/or Asian Communities reside.

The CEO supports the Governor's bill H.B 7030 AN ACT PROTECTING THE CREDIT OF CERTAIN UTILITY CUSTOMERS. This bill limits the sharing of information with credit bureaus for those who are going through financial difficulties and struggling to pay their utility bills.

It is within this context that I urge passage and welcome any questions you may have regarding these important matters.