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General Assembly  
January Session, 2017

**Proposed Bill No. 6219**

LCO No. 1997



Referred to Committee on LABOR AND PUBLIC  
EMPLOYEES

To: Michael Harris - Special Assistant to the Mayor

State Liaison and Intergovernmental Affairs

City of New Haven

Re: Testimony on Support For Reentry

Written By: John Tejada

My name is John Tejada, and I spent twenty months in the custody of the state of Connecticut. I am writing to provide testimony to the Labor Committee regarding a proposed bill relating to resources for reentry employment support. I attest that the following words are solely my own, and have not been changed, or influenced by anyone else.

Having said that... here is my story. I have a bachelor's degree from one of the top 20 universities in the country. I have worked for companies such as Merrill Lynch, ESPN, and Tribune Broadcasting. I have no history of alcohol abuse, and can honestly say I have never taken an illicit drug in my life... but I made one mistake. Five years ago I made a mistake, committed a crime that lead to my imprisonment. It was a place I never thought I would end up, but I did.

Once I was released, I was left to attempt to start my life over. I had to find a place to live, a way to get around, and a job. I knew none of these tasks would be easy, but nothing really prepares you for how difficult it is to start over. I lived in a hotel for a while. Used my friends cars to get around the state. And spent every waking moment at the Capital Workforce job center looking for work. Finding a job became my job. Unfortunately, it doesn't pay. And it is nearly impossible to survive in this world without a paying job. I had the education, I had the job skills, but I had this cloud hanging over me that is nearly impossible to get out from under. But here is the question, if I have

all of this ability and still can't find work, what about those who are leaving custody who don't have my resume? How hard is it for them to find work? The answer is, nearly impossible

Those looking to reenter society after incarceration face an uphill battle in finding employment. Companies often will turn them away once they find out you have been incarcerated. Some cases it is immediate, telling the applicant that they do not hire ex-offenders no matter the circumstance of your arrest. Some employers show empathy for the applicants situation, only to later turn them down based on the background check... even though the ex-offender was open and honest during the interview and assured that it would not affect their candidacy. Non-profits will say that there is a conflict of interest, other companies site insurance regulations barring the employment of those reentering society.

To put it simply, ex-offenders need help. There has to be more regulations in place, more resources to aid those looking rejoin society. Whether it is the creation of more job centers, training classes, or job coaches for those leaving incarceration, things need to be put in place. Companies need to be have an incentive to hire those leaving state facilities.

I know many people will say that offenders made their choice. They had their chance and they blew it. But how do you judge someone based on their worst day? How can you have a criminal justice system based on the theory of rehabilitation, and then release people into the world without the necessary resources they need to get their lives back on track? Without increase resources, without incentives for employment, we are left with a group of people who have nowhere to go. People are serving their time. They will be released. Those facts aren't going to change. What comes next for these people can.