



DATE: Thursday, February 16, 2017

TO: Labor and Public Employees Committee

FROM: Julia Wilcox, Senior Public Policy Specialist, The Alliance

RE: HB 6219 – ‘AN ACT CONCERNING COMMUNITY REENTRY BY PERSONS WHO WERE INCARCERATED.’

Good Afternoon Senator Gomes, Senator Miner, Representative Porter, Representative Bocchino and distinguished members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee:

My name is Julia Wilcox, Senior Public Policy Specialist at The Alliance. The Alliance is Connecticut’s statewide association of community nonprofits, which serve over 500,000 people each year and employ almost 14% of Connecticut’s workforce.

I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in support of HB 6219 – ‘An Act Concerning Community Reentry by Persons Who Were Incarcerated.’

The Alliance appreciates the efforts of Representative McGee, to explore creative and critical solutions to the issues related to employment for individuals involved in the criminal justice system. The elimination of barriers to successful reentry is a critical component to success. According to the National Reentry Resource Center, 95% of adults sentenced to prison will return to the community. Reentry will be their next step.

In December, 2016, The Malta Justice Initiative Inc. sponsored the comprehensive ‘[Connecticut Employer Survey: Practices and Attitudes Regarding the Hiring of Formerly-Incarcerated Persons and Recommendations for Driving Better Outcomes.](#)’ The research showed that getting and holding a legitimate job within the first year of release is the single most important factor in whether a person succeeds on the outside or ends up back in prison.’ The Malta survey found a strong willingness among Connecticut employers to hire formerly-incarcerated persons under certain circumstances, particularly if the perceived risks are mitigated and/or incentives are provided. Nearly 95% of respondents agreed that hiring an ex-offender has the potential to turn them into a productive member of society and 97% agree that those with a non-violent criminal record deserve a second chance.

Community nonprofits have long supported the expansion of treatment programs and alternatives to incarceration, for those involved in the criminal justice system of the state. Many community nonprofits that provide community justice services in Connecticut are primarily funded by the CT Department of Correction (DOC), and/or the Court Support Services Division (CSSD) of the Judicial Branch. Community reentry programs have historically served as an extensive cost savings measure, which not only increases public safety, but strengthens the very fabric of our communities. As the state continues to address the ongoing state budget crisis, it is essential to view the support of community-based, reentry services not as an expense, but rather, an investment in social justice, public safety and the overall welfare of our state. The ‘Second Chance Society’ must be more than an initiative. It must be a total and ongoing shift in philosophy, in order to become a reality.

Connecticut has long been considered a national model at the forefront of overarching criminal justice reform. Not only for the innovative approach the state has adopted - including the Second Chance Society Initiative and successfully repealing the death penalty, - but in terms of best practices and real results, as reflected in national studies. Most

criminal justice research focuses on the effectiveness of programs that seek to reduce recidivism by changing offender attitudes and behavior. Reductions in recidivism rates translate to breaking the cycle of crime and poverty that plagues so many communities across the nation.

With the anticipated decrease in offender population within the DOC facilities in 2017 and beyond, there will be a corresponding need for additional supervised placements within the community justice provider network of services. It is essential that the state recalibrate the necessary funding and infrastructure to accommodate this shift and ensure continued success. A critical component to the successful reintegration of these individuals post-incarceration is the self esteem, economic stability and growth that is achieved through gainful employment.

To this end, The Alliance urges the State to continue progress towards improving the rate of successful community reentry for persons released from correctional facilities through the provision of enhanced employment opportunities.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue. Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions you may have.

Julia Wilcox, Senior Public Policy Specialist
JWilcox@ctnonprofitalliance.org | 860.525.5080 x1025