

March 21, 2018 Testimony in Support of HB 5544

Dear Senator Doyle, Senator Kissel, Representative Tong, and members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Angela Bellas. I live in Manchester, Connecticut. I am a social worker, an educator, a mother, and the daughter of an immigrant. I write to express my support for House Bill 5544: An Act Concerning Connecticut Misdemeanor Sentences. This proposed legislation would reduce the maximum length of all misdemeanor convictions in Connecticut to 364 days. Passing this bill would stop part of the prison-to-deportation pipeline, which funnels our community members, who have already served their time in state correctional facilities, directly into immigration detention and deportation proceedings. Individuals who served mere months or less for minor charges shouldn't be ripped away from their families and communities!

We cannot allow the State of Connecticut to feed our community members into an unjust, profit-driven and inhumane deportation machine. We must ensure that all of our community members, regardless of immigration status, can live freely once out of state custody. This is a requirement of truly living in a "second chance society."

Reducing the maximum length of all misdemeanor convictions to 364 days would reduce mass incarceration in the state of Connecticut. Mass incarceration is the over-incarceration of Black and Latinx men, women and youth. In the United States, Black men are six times as likely to be incarcerated as their white, non-Hispanic counterparts (Wagner, 2012). Latinx people are four times as likely to be incarcerated than their white, non-Hispanic peers in the state of Connecticut (Nellis, 2016). Mass incarceration is the direct result of generations of structural racism, which we should all be working to end. Mass incarceration, including in detention centers, has harmed too many of our families and too many of our neighborhoods. Our goal should be to keep folks out of prison, not to detain more of our neighbors for longer when the charges against them are minor and non-violent.

HB 5544 offers a simple, technical fix to part of a large and complex problem that we must demonstrate the political will to solve if we want to live in a state that truly recognizes the human rights and human dignity of each and every one of us- in a state where we work together to build strong, safe and vibrant communities for our children to play in, learn in and thrive in. I urge you to vote yes and pass HB 5544 out of committee.

Sincerely,

Angela Bellas, MSW
Uniting for a Safe Inclusive Community
Manchester, CT