



Connecticut Students for a Dream

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**Testimony to the Judiciary Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly**

March 21, 2017

**Testimony in support of House Bill 5544: AN ACT CONCERNING CONNECTICUT MISDEMEANOR SENTENCES**

Honorable Chairs and Members of the Judiciary Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly:

We, Connecticut Students for a Dream, call on the members of the Judiciary Committee to pass and vote favorably on House Bill 5544: AN ACT CONCERNING CONNECTICUT MISDEMEANOR SENTENCES. This bill would reduce the maximum length of all misdemeanor convictions in Connecticut to from 365 days to 364 days.

C4D is a statewide youth-led network fighting for the rights of undocumented immigrant youth and their families. We do this through community organizing, leadership development, and advocacy. We are proud to be the only organization in Connecticut that is led by and for immigrant youth directly impacted by the issues we seek to address. Our organization is made up of our members and leaders, who are high school aged, college aged, and young adults from the entire state of Connecticut.

We view this bill as an important step to protecting the rights of our immigrant communities and our immigrant families. Currently in the state of CT misdemeanor convictions can carry sentence of up to 365 day or less. For immigration purposes convictions that carry a sentence of 365 days or more can have severe consequences for immigrants and families. A 365 day or more conviction means that individuals can funneled directly into detention and deportation and/or make adjust of status nearly impossible.

CT's current law of having misdemeanors carry a sentence of 365 days or less means that individuals who have been convicted of a charge that carries a sentence of max 365 days will be targeted for deportation, even if the actual sentences was only a few months. This is because what matters for immigration purposes is the max sentence that can come along with the charge. This means individuals who served mere months or less for minor charges can be ripped away from their families and communities. This is unacceptably cruel.

Deportation should not and cannot be an appropriate punishment for a misdemeanor charge. It is cruel to break apart a family and destroy lives due to a misdemeanor charge. This is effectively what our state of Connecticut is allowing and endorsing. Connecticut is disproportionately punishing immigrant community members who are convicted of misdemeanors, and their families.

Deportation destroys lives, deportation breaks up families, deportation fractures communities. The consequences that a family that has a mother or father deported due to a misdemeanor charge faces are extreme. Children, often US citizens, lose their parent and are traumatized, a family loses its primary source of income plunging those left behind into poverty. The consequences carry far beyond those few months that the community member was originally convicted for, the consequences last a lifetime. In our work in our communities we've seen time and time again what deportation does to families and communities. If our state has an opportunity to fix an unfair consequence of CT law we have a moral obligation to do so.

Individuals convicted of a misdemeanor charge, no matter their current immigration status, deserve a right to serve out their conviction and re-enter society. CT's current law doesn't allow our immigrant community members to do that.

This technical fix of reducing misdemeanor sentences from 365 to 364 days, just by ONE day, would make a meaningful difference in the lives of immigrants and their families in our state.

CT Students for a Dream and our members believe that our state cannot be complicit in separating families and hurting our immigrant communities, and we cannot feed our community members in a system that criminalizes our communities and families. CT must stop the cycle of mass incarceration and deportation that disproportionately impacts communities of color and immigrants.

This bill would help keep Connecticut communities and families intact and together. We urge the committee to vote favorably on HB5544

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CT Students for a Dream