



March 15th, 2018

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

My name is Ana María Rivera Forastieri, I am the co-director of the Connecticut Bail Fund, a grassroots organization organizing and supporting individuals that are facing criminal charges and deportation. We operate two revolving community bail funds that we use to support people that are incarcerated pre-trial or in federal immigration detention because they cannot afford bail. I am here today to testify in support of **H.B. 5544 AA Concerning the Recommendations of the Connecticut Sentencing Commission With Respect to Misdemeanor Sentences.**

Our organization has seen first-hand the fear and harm that the current immigration enforcement practices have caused in our community. People are afraid to breathe in this current political climate, children are terrified of what may happen to their parents while they are in school, individuals are afraid to access our courts because despite the fact that our constitution awards certain rights to everyone who sets foot in this country, it appears that the concepts of equal justice and due process are diluted under the current administration.

But Connecticut has attempted to take a different approach. We have passed laws that guarantee access to basic human rights, we have welcomed refugees fleeing violence and persecution in their countries of origin, we have passed laws that recognize that it is not in the interest of our community that Immigration Customs Enforcement (ICE) and our law enforcement cooperate. But we could go further.

This bill which would reduce the maximum sentence of Connecticut misdemeanors by one day thereby addressing some of the drastic and disproportionate collateral consequences that immigrant communities face when they are convicted of misdemeanors in our state.

Even though the state of Connecticut has labeled certain state offenses as “misdemeanors”, federal immigration statutes treat them as aggravated felonies which makes most non-citizens deportable and ineligible for nearly all forms of immigration relief (including asylum, cancellation of removal and victims of domestic violence). Non-citizens that are convicted of a single Connecticut misdemeanor can also be subject to deportation, regardless of the actual sentences imposed, regardless of the fact that person may never serve a single day in jail.

I have been engaged in deportation defense work for over five years. Each case and the strategies we employ to support individuals and their families are different. But without a doubt, the toughest cases we encounter are those of members of our community that have been convicted of a crime—often low-level crimes—that most people would not think would result in deportation.