



*550 members in 12 shoreline and surrounding towns
safeguarding fundamental human rights through grassroots action*

Judiciary Committee Public Hearing, March 28, 2018

Testimony in Support of H.B. 5544

**An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the Connecticut Sentencing Commission with Respect to
Misdemeanor Sentences**

Connecticut Shoreline Indivisible (CTSI) is a non-partisan grass roots organization and a member of the Connecticut Immigrant Rights Alliance. Our mission includes a strong commitment to creating a more just society by addressing systemic injustice and racism. To that end, our Immigration & Refugee Action Team defends the human and civil rights of immigrants in a broad spectrum of contexts which ranges from supporting specific families threatened by deportation to promoting laws that embody equitable principles and policies.

One of the injustices that has come to our attention is that the current maximum sentence of 365 days for misdemeanors in Connecticut can have devastating immigration consequences: It can lead to deportation. Because lawmakers never intended or anticipated such a drastic and disproportionate effect of a misdemeanor conviction, the Connecticut Sentencing Commission issued a recommendation that the maximum sentence be reduced by only one day – to 364 days.

We ask the Committee to strongly endorse the Sentencing Commission's proposal as set forth in H.B. 5544 for the following reasons:

A 365-day maximum sentence can subject to deportation non-citizens who have only committed a misdemeanor regardless of whether they are actually sentenced for a year. It also makes it impossible for immigrants without green cards, who may have led exemplary lives in every other respect, to apply for cancellation of removal, one of the few options that long-term residents have for obtaining a green card.

Another extremely harsh effect of the current statute is that immigrants sentenced to 365 days for crimes that federal immigration law deems 'aggravated felonies' are detained and deported for misdemeanors that are not, in reality, either 'aggravated' or 'felonies,' but are characterized as such only because the sentence, even if suspended, is 365 rather than 364 days.

In an era when the current administration seeks to stigmatize and deport as many immigrants as possible, it is more urgent than ever that state laws do not have the unintended consequence of feeding immigrants into an increasingly cruel and arbitrary deportation machine that is grinding up families and spitting out their members into countries which are unsafe for them to return to or with which they no longer have any connection or support system.

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