



CONNECTICUT
LEGAL
RIGHTS
PROJECT, INC.

TESTIMONY OF KATHLEEN FLAHERTY, ESQ.,
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, CT LEGAL RIGHTS PROJECT, INC.
JUDICIARY COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING
MARCH 26, 2018

IN SUPPORT OF H.B. 5578, AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CONNECTICUT SENTENCING COMMISSION WITH RESPECT TO THE SEXUAL OFFENDER REGISTRY.

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

Good afternoon. My name is Kathy Flaherty and I'm the Executive Director of Connecticut Legal Rights Project (CLRP), a statewide non-profit agency that provides legal services to low income adults with serious mental health conditions. CLRP was established in 1990 pursuant to a Consent Order which mandated that the state provide funding for CLRP to protect the civil rights of DMHAS clients who are hospitalized, as well as those clients who are living in the community.

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CLRP supports HB 5578, An Act Concerning the Recommendations of the CT Sentencing Commission With Respect to the Sexual Offender Registry. We have clients, both in and outside of the hospitals, who are affected by their status on the sex offender registry. In our practice, we see the negative effects primarily in the area of housing. Clients who are on a sex offender registry are unable to access most subsidized housing. Ironically, the ban on accepting people on the lifetime sex offender registry into most public housing is that people with such a record then end up homeless, making it more difficult to keep track of them.

From the point of view of our clients, access to safe affordable housing is the cornerstone on which they can build, or rebuild, their lives. Having a place to live and to go home to is essential to recovery. The blanket ban on acceptance to people on a lifetime sex offender registry, coupled with Connecticut's undifferentiated registry system, has eliminated most affordable housing for sex offenders and prevented many people from starting their lives over.

This bill addresses the problem by taking into account that the likelihood of a sex offender reoffending varies greatly among individuals. The bill balances concern for safety with people's rights to privacy and to live their lives. This proposed statute differentiates the level of risk using objective criteria. It provides for both public and private registries, and has an option for people to petition for removal from the registry after a period of time. This will increase public safety as law enforcement will be able to focus on people who present the highest levels of risk. It will allow people who pose minimal and no risk to return to society and to access housing.

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