

Judiciary Committee, March 26, 2018  
Testimony submitted by Wally Hilke, Law Student Intern, Yale Law School/New Haven  
Legal Assistance Association Reentry Clinic

In Support of H.B. No. 5578, AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS  
OF THE CONNECTICUT SENTENCING COMMISSION WITH RESPECT TO THE  
SEXUAL OFFENDER REGISTRY

I write to support Raised House Bill 5578 [HB 5578], based on my experiences providing legal advocacy to people convicted of sex offenses at the Yale Law School/New Haven Legal Assistance Association Reentry Clinic.

Since January 2017, I have been a law student intern with the Yale Law School/New Haven Legal Assistance Association Reentry Clinic. The clinic provides civil legal representation to people with criminal convictions.

I have advocated for several clients who are required to register as sex offenders. Some have been required to register for nearly 30 years, despite no evidence that they pose any risk. The sex offender registration requirements limit their ability to find housing, maintain a job, and provide support to their spouses and partners.

HB 5578 would end the practice of imposing uniform sex-offense registration requirements on people convicted of sex offenses. It would create a new risk-based registration system. It would also allow individuals required to register as sex offenders, after a certain amount of time, to petition for removal. These changes would reduce the imposition of counterproductive requirements on people convicted of sex offenses.

One of my clients, Fred\*, had been required to register as a sex offender for nearly thirty years. In the three decades following his conviction, none of his actions indicated a risk of sexual re-offense. He remarried, worked a difficult job for low pay, and found ways to give back to his community through service work and through his church. When Fred faced eviction as a result of his status on the sex offender registry, it took a tremendous amount of time – nearly a year of legal assistance – to maintain his housing. Few people in Fred's situation can obtain such advocacy resources, and they should not need to move mountains in order to maintain stability in housing and employment.

The Special Committee on Sex Offenders' report of December 2017 explains that myths about sex offenders have guided public policy, in Connecticut and across the country. I have seen these myths needlessly corrode the lives of my clients. As the report shows, current laws actually make it harder for people convicted of sex offenses to rebuild stable lives. HB 5578 is a step in the right direction, and I hope that the legislature will consider the experiences of people like Fred as they evaluate this bill.