



DATE: March 28, 2018
TO: Judiciary Committee
FROM: Julia Wilcox, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy
RE: HB 5531 - AN ACT CONCERNING ENHANCED EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS
HB 5578 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CONNECTICUT SENTENCING COMMISSION WITH RESPECT TO THE SEXUAL OFFENDER REGISTRY

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

My name is Julia Wilcox, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy at the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance. The Alliance is Connecticut's statewide association of community nonprofits. Our members deliver essential services to more than half a million people each year and employ almost 14% of Connecticut's workforce.

I appreciate the opportunity to comment on HB 5531 - AN ACT CONCERNING ENHANCED EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS, and HB 5578 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CONNECTICUT SENTENCING COMMISSION WITH RESPECT TO THE SEXUAL OFFENDER REGISTRY

We commend the Committee for your efforts to bring forth this legislation, which have the potential to impact citizens involved in the criminal justice system during their period of incarceration and afterwards as they reintegrate into their communities across Connecticut.

Connecticut's Community Justice Leadership

The citizens of Connecticut are fortunate in that the legislature, Department of Correction, the Judicial Branch, and Governor Malloy consistently serve as leaders on a national basis with regard to criminal justice policy. Connecticut has long been considered a national model at the forefront of overarching criminal justice reform for the innovative approaches the state has adopted, including the Second Chance Society Initiative. Most criminal justice research focuses on the effectiveness of programs that seek to reduce recidivism by changing offender attitudes and behavior. Reductions in recidivism rates translate to breaking the cycle of crime and poverty that plagues so many communities across the nation.

The proposed legislation continues the efforts of the legislature to build upon past success, maintain momentum of the Second Chance Society Initiative, and provide the tools necessary to ensure that our returning citizens are actively engaged and invested in their reentry process, their families and their communities.

As of January 1, 2018, there were 4,674 citizens of our state who were receiving community supervision from nonprofit providers who contract with the DOC. This is a 13% increase within a two - year period, while the prison population was simultaneously reduced by 13%. Thousands more receive services through providers who contract with CSSD and the Judicial Branch.

Commentary re: HB 5531 & HB 5578 - 3.28.18

HB No 5531 - AN ACT CONCERNING ENHANCED EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS: To require the Commissioner of Correction to establish a job training program that permits an incarcerated individual to participate in a vocational training program that is designed to qualify the individual for an apprenticeship position upon release from incarceration.

In Support: Section 1 of the proposed legislation states that the Commissioner of Correction, in collaboration with the Labor Commissioner and the Commissioner of Consumer Protection shall "...develop a vocational program for incarcerated individuals, that is designed to allow the individual to attain an apprenticeship position in a skilled trade upon his or her release from incarceration." In addition, (on or before January 1, 2019, and annually thereafter), the Commissioner of Correction shall report on the operational status of the program to the joint standing committees of the General Assembly having cognizance of matters relating to the judiciary, labor and consumer protection. Such report shall include identification of any barriers that may be impeding full implementation of the vocational program established under this section.

Recommendation: A critical component to the successful reintegration of our citizens post-incarceration is the self-esteem, economic stability and growth achieved through gainful employment. While the vocational training program as outlined in the proposed legislation is incredibly important, the focus on employment must extend beyond incarceration. In order for these returning citizens to achieve their full potential, it is critical that the legislature supports a vibrant, sustainable network of vocational programs as provided within the communities of Connecticut through nonprofit providers of reentry services.

HB No 5578 - AN ACT CONCERNING THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE CONNECTICUT SENTENCING COMMISSION WITH RESPECT TO THE SEXUAL OFFENDER REGISTRY: To enact the recommendations of the Connecticut Sentencing Commission with respect to the sex offender registry.

In Support: The Alliance commends members of the Connecticut Sentencing Commission for their intensive efforts to develop these critical revisions to the Sexual Offender Registry. The changes proposed to the registry will focus resources on the most high risk offenders while keeping intact the specialized probation and parole units that are largely responsible for the day to day treatment and supervision of offenders in the community.

The proposed legislation provides a balance between maintaining public safety, while respecting and supporting the rights of individuals – both victims and offenders. The proposed statute differentiates the level of risk, utilizing extensive criteria, creating a more effective, tiered registry. Section 1, includes the following important determinations regarding categories of offenders, for the purposes of implementing the revised process:

- (3) "Highest-risk offender" means an offender who has been assessed and determined by a placement panel of the Sexual Offender Registration Board under section 2 of this act to be a highest-risk offender.
- (6) "Lowest-risk offender" means an offender who has been assessed and determined by a placement panel of the Sexual Offender Registration Board under section 2 of this act to be a lowest-risk offender.
- (8) "Moderate-risk offender" means an offender who has been assessed and determined by a placement panel of the Sexual Offender Registration Board under section 2 of this act to be a moderate-risk offender

In an effort to best address the extremely unique challenges of managing this particular offender population, Connecticut has utilized a successful collaboration between the Court Support Services of the Judicial Branch, the Department of Correction, sex offender treatment providers, and sexual assault victim advocates. The emphasis on nationally-recognized program models, has contributed greatly to the low rate of recidivism among this group of

offenders in our state.

Recommendation:

The Alliance concurs with recommendations of the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence, and the Sentencing Commission, as follows: We urge the committee to amend the language to include the Connecticut Sentencing Commission's recommendation to create a multidisciplinary advisory group including individuals who manage the current Registry, to plan for the implementation changes in order to minimize the impact to victims and prepare victim advocates and those within the law enforcement community for new protocols.

The Alliance also concurs with recommendations of the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut, as follows: We agree that Commission's recommendations included will make the sexual offender registry more effective and fair. However, according to the ACLU-CT, this bill has "a serious constitutional vulnerability." The proposal would deny thousands of registrants who are currently on the public registry the ability to petition off of the registries due to the date of their conviction. Basing whether someone can petition off the registries on the date of their conviction is arbitrary. This inequity will make the state vulnerable to equal protection challenges. We therefore support the ACLU-CT in their request to allow all on the registries the opportunity to petition off of them.

Thank you for your consideration and the opportunity to submit testify on various bills, with recommendations as noted above. Please feel free to contact me with questions or for additional information.

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