

February 7, 2019

**Housing Committee - Public Hearing on  
Proposed S.B. No. 54, An Act Concerning A Landlord's Ability to Review Criminal Records Relating to a  
Prospective Tenant AND Proposed Bill No. 5713, An Act Concerning Inquiries About the Criminal  
Convictions of a Prospective Tenant AND Proposed Bill No. 5712, An Act Concerning the Connecticut Clean  
Slate Law**

**Written Testimony of Cathy K. Forcier**

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Housing Committee –

I have been a public housing practitioner for over 25 years. I am currently the Executive Director of the Wethersfield Housing Authority. My experience includes being a past President of the Connecticut Chapter of the National Association of Housing & Redevelopment Officials more commonly known as CONN-NAHRO.

I understand the problem these bills are attempting to resolve and the difficulty in doing so but I cannot support the proposed S.B. No 153, Proposed Bill No. 5713 or Proposed Bill No. 5712. I cannot support these bills unless there is consideration for violent felony convictions that could affect the safety of current residents. The bills should also allow a housing provider to see if there is a pattern of behavior that might be missed if the lookback period is too short. I feel strongly there must be no restriction on the lookback period for criminal sexual conduct, including but not limited to sexual assault, rape, incest or child abuse. State law on this matter must not be in conflict with the federal statutes, which would require a housing provider to have different policies for different programs, treating individuals differently.

One lookback period for all crimes does not make practical sense. A housing provider needs the leeway to determine what may affect the health, safety and welfare of its current residents, including the elderly, disabled and children.

I do see a problem with the use of “automated background checks” and don’t use them at my agency. We look at each case and each conviction. We also provide an opportunity for a hearing where the applicant who received an adverse decision can give detail on mitigating circumstances that they want considered.

One experience I had was right after taking over at an agency that did not have clear screening policies in place and an existing tenant had married a man in prison for a sex crime and requested he be allowed to move in with her when released. With no clear policy, at the time, and a great deal of documentation of programs he had participated in to rehabilitate himself while in prison, I had no choice but to allow him to move in. Within a year he had re-offended, this time not with his girlfriend’s daughter but with his wife’s granddaughter. There was a panic at the property amongst the elderly and disabled as well as by the mothers at an adjacent family property housing over 200 children. Even a 7 year lookback in this case would not have helped as this person spent that much time in prison serving his sentence; there was no time to rehabilitate in the real world. Participating in prison programs is not the same as doing so in the real world.

I have a responsibility to my residents to make their homes as safe as possible. I realize there is a problem with lack of housing for those coming out of prison but perhaps halfway houses are a better short term solution. This way an individual will have the opportunity to show he/she will not re-offend while in an environment more tempting than prison.

The solution is not to put frail elderly, the disabled including those with mental illness and small children at risk. There must be a balance. It is suggested the housing committee meet with and discuss these issues with the CONN-NAHRO board to come to a consensus.

Respectfully submitted,

Cathy K. Forcier