



**Hartford Foundation**  
FOR PUBLIC GIVING

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**Testimony Supporting S. B. 54,  
An Act Concerning a Landlord's Ability to Review  
Criminal Records Relating to a Prospective Tenant**

**Testimony Supporting H.B. 5713,  
An Act Concerning Inquiries about the Criminal  
Convictions of a Prospective Tenant**

**Housing Committee  
February 7, 2019**

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Senator Dennis, Representative McGee, Senator Hwang, Representative Dauphinais, and distinguished members of the Housing Committee. The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is grateful for this opportunity to submit written testimony **in support of S. B. 54, An Act Concerning a Landlord's Ability to Review Criminal Records Relating to a Prospective Tenant, and H.B. 5713, An Act Concerning Inquiries about the Criminal Convictions of a Prospective Tenant.**

**The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving is the community foundation for the 29-town Greater Hartford region.** As a community foundation, we manage, grow, and distribute approximately \$1 billion in assets to promote equitable opportunity for all residents in our region, particularly in the areas of education, community safety, and community and economic development. Since 2007, our work has included support for our region's returning citizens – the up to 95 percent of those incarcerated in Connecticut who will return to the community one day.<sup>1</sup> We know that access to housing is one critical component of their successful reentry into the community, and yet many residents who have experienced incarceration continue to face barriers to housing many years after completing their sentences.

**The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving strongly supports the effort to decrease the stigma that many individuals with previous criminal records face long after completing their sentences.**

Recently, we were proud to participate in a broad, multisector Reentry Working Group about housing options and barriers Connecticut residents experience as they return to their communities after incarceration. House Bill 5713 and Senate Bill 54 arose in part from the recommendations of the Reentry Working Group, which reflect thorough research and input from state and municipal agencies, advocates, nonprofits, and landlords.

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<sup>1</sup> Reentry Trends in the United States. (Rev. Feb. 6, 2019.) Timothy Hughes and Doris James Wilson. Bureau of Justice Statistics. Retrieved from: [www.bjs.gov/content/reentry/reentry.cfm](http://www.bjs.gov/content/reentry/reentry.cfm).

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**House Bill 5713 and Senate Bill 54 would each establish a defined “lookback period” for landlords conducting criminal background checks upon a prospective tenant, reflecting research showing that the likelihood of recidivism declines over time after individuals return from prison.**<sup>2</sup> Landlords could still access prospective tenants’ criminal records for a set number of years after release. Lookback periods simply help ensure that returning citizens who do not reoffend for many years after release get the second chances they deserve.

**Housing is a fundamental basic human need that many returning citizens struggle to access: during a 2017 focus group in Greater Hartford, 69% of recently released individuals reported needing housing.**<sup>3</sup> Since 2007, the Hartford Foundation has funded critical reentry supports to help returning citizens succeed, including pre-employment training and job placement assistance offered through the BEST Chance Program and the new Reentry Welcome Center in Hartford, which provides individuals with one-stop access following release to basic services and referrals to other programs. Our investments in supporting returning citizens have reinforced important lessons:

- Housing is an essential resource, without which most people cannot succeed.
- The stigma facing returning citizens who seek housing, employment, and successful reentry into the community undermines their rehabilitation.
- Individuals can become contributing members to their families and community, and their success should be recognized and rewarded.

We cannot speak to the specific length or mechanism of the criminal lookback period: on those matters we will defer to the expertise of this committee, the Department of Correction, and the Department of Housing. We encourage consultation of the best available research regarding the declining recidivism rates over time after the end of individuals’ sentences. However, we support the substance and purpose of both these bills and urge the committee to support the housing needs of our state’s returning citizens.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact our staff at [policy@hfp.org](mailto:policy@hfp.org) or 860-548-1888.

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Redemption’ in an Era of Widespread Criminal Background Checks. (2009.) Alfred Blumstein and Kiminori Nakamura. National Institute of Justice Journal 263, 12-13. Retrieved from: <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/226872.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Other most frequently identified needs of returning citizens included food (82%), employment (66%), clothing (61%), and healthcare (61%). Greater Hartford Reentry Center Plan. (2017.) Diamond Research Consulting. 41. Retrieved from [http://www.hfp.org/files/1215/2847/2687/GH\\_Reentry\\_Center\\_Plan\\_12.30.2017\\_final\\_reduced\\_size.pdf](http://www.hfp.org/files/1215/2847/2687/GH_Reentry_Center_Plan_12.30.2017_final_reduced_size.pdf).