

Signal, Joey

From: Aurora Melita [redacted]
Sent: Thursday, February 07, 2019 9:45 AM
To: HSGTestimony
Subject: Today's Testimony Housing Committee
Attachments: Testimony Housing Committee 02072019.docx; ATT00001.htm

Dear Housing Committee,

I am reaching out to submit testimony on behalf of Karen DuBois-Walton, Executive Director of the New Haven Housing Authority on SB 54, HB 5844, HB 5712 and HB 5713.

Thank you,
Aurora

February 6, 2019

Members of the Housing Committee
CT State Legislature
Legislative Office Building
300 Capitol Ave
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Honorable Members of the Committee:

I write to offer testimony on several pieces of pending legislation that in my estimation offer an opportunity to increase opportunity and access to some of CT's families who are living in the most vulnerable situations. As you are aware, housing stability provides the bedrock upon which families may begin to chart their future. To ask anyone to begin to move toward self-sufficiency, greater economic mobility, economic stability and socio-emotional growth without the ability to access a safe and secure place to call home is unreasonable and destined to fall short of the goal. The work that I engage in daily is work that seeks to expand the opportunity to attain safe, affordable housing and to pursue their goals. I am the President of Elm City Communities, the Housing Authority of the City of New Haven and I present this testimony on behalf of the over 6,000 families (over 14,000 individuals) that benefit from our services. But I also stand on behalf of the tens of thousands of families on our waiting lists and those in need of the services that we provide.

Please allow me to speak on behalf of the following items:

- **SB No. 54** An Act Concerning a Landlord's Ability to Review Criminal Records Relating to a Prospective Tenant
- **H.B. No 5844** An Act Requiring Housing Authorities to Provide Voter Registration Applications to Prospective Tenants
- **H.B. No 5712** An Act Concerning the CT Clean Slate Law
- **H.B. No. 5713** An Act Concerning Inquiries About the Criminal Convictions of a Prospective Tenant

Each of these items are included in our legislative agenda and represent reforms that we have made locally with great success that we believe should become law throughout our state. Both offer opportunity for families to participate fully in our democracy and in our public offerings removing real and perceived barriers to inclusion.

ECC/HANH began its re-entry policies over 10 years ago in response to the number of returning citizens being released from a period of incarceration. With housing being a predominant need, ECC/HANH revised our admission and screening criteria, created preferences on our waitlists and set aside a limited number of units and vouchers for the re-entry population. We couple our housing with supportive services that help residents remain lease compliant while pursuing educational and employment goals. Our success rate has been high. Our recidivism rate has consistently been well-below the state and national averages. In the past 5 years, less than 10% of individuals have been re-incarcerated compared

with a State 1 year reoffend rate of 38% and 3 year rate of 65%. Compliance rates with our lease and service plans has also been exceptional and those who have secured employment have all maintained that employment for at least 6 months.

We modeled our screening procedure on a "clean slate" look back period that treats convictions beyond 3 years (misdemeanors) and 5 years (felonies) as inconsequential for our consideration. Our clean slate approach in housing removes a significant barrier, however, criminal records continue to be a barrier for individuals in many other sectors of their lives. We support clean slate initiatives so that other housing providers follow suit and so that criminal records cease being a barrier in other sectors as well. We believe that our success indicates that **S.B. No 54, H.B. 5712 and H.B. No. 5713** are all worthwhile reforms that increase housing opportunity without further risk to the community and without increased landlord liability. We urge passage.

Additionally, in November we became the first CT Public Housing Authority to create an automatic voter registration for all new residents of our housing developments and voucher holders. We believe that every effort to increase voter registration and participation should be undertaken. Given the connection between residency and voter registration, partnering with affordable housing providers to make voter registration a part of lease up makes tremendous sense. At ECC/HANH we have implemented an automatic voter registration process with the option to opt-out if desired. We believe this represents a step forward toward automatic voter registration. As such, we urge passage of **H.B. No 5844** An Act Requiring Housing Authorities to Provide Voter Registration Applications to Prospective Tenants and would further suggest that this requirement be extended to all housing providers who receive support through CT's Department of Housing or CT Housing Finance Authority.

Should further information be required, please contact me at kdwalton@elmcitycommunities.org or (203) 498-8800 ext. 1002. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Karen DuBois-Walton, Ph.D.
President