

Written Testimony of Tiheba Bain
supporting House Bill 6921, An Act Concerning Discrimination
Based on a Person's Criminal History

Good Afternoon Senator Kushner, Representative Porter, and distinguished members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee.”

My name is Tiheba Bain; I am the founder of Women Against Mass Incarceration and employed by the National Council for Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls. I am here to testify in support of House Bill 6921, An Act Concerning Discrimination Based on a Person's Criminal History, which impedes discrimination towards people solely based on their criminal record.

Trauma is very real collateral consequence for formerly incarcerated people living through the process of reintegration. Trying to reintegrate into a society that hinders, blocks and resents with every closed door is traumatizing.

The term “Returning Citizen” is used loosely in reference to a person returning home from a prison. Yet, people returning home after incarceration in CT face over 600 legal and policy barriers including but not limited to insurance, housing, employment and education. A non-returning citizen does not face these same barriers; barriers that make adjusting to normalcy of life difficult mentally, emotionally, economically, and spiritually.

We all want our communities safe and strong thriving in economic security. However, when one faces as many barriers in society as a formerly incarcerated person does, it is challenging to live mentally secure. The penance paid does not end upon time served. It is merely redirected and perpetuated after release, in the form of discrimination.

In 2018 74% of Connecticut voters support passing legislation that prohibits discrimination against formerly incarcerated people. A public opinion poll of registered Connecticut voters, conducted by the ACLU found that 71% REPUBLICANS, 92% DEMS AND 80% INDEPENDENTS ALL AGREE, people with a criminal history can become productive members of society with the right kind of help. This assistance will come from passing HB 6921, to expand the scope of Connecticut's anti-discrimination laws prohibiting discrimination based on one's criminal record. With numbers like these we could be a bipartisan win for HB6921 here in Connecticut.

House Bill 6921 is especially important to me because, out of my hurt and pain of being phased out for a position here in CT in which I was recruited for this bill was birthed. Subsequent to

being approach by someone who was given my name for a position and having multiple in person and phone interviews, I was phased out after revealing the crime I committed over 16 years ago, was a violent offense. I was also denied life insurance after checking the box and my oldest son life insurance was discontinued due to his arrest and conviction. Certain landlords wanted to know why I did not have a recent rental history, then the details of my crime. My criminal record should be held against me as to whether or not I live with basic human needs in order to support my family. Our basic human needs should not be contingent on a criminal history.

To be politically correct formerly incarcerated people are not returning citizens. our fundamental civil rights are not restored but are constantly held under scrutiny. In our pursuit of life, liberty and happiness we fight, to vote, to live and to be forgiven for a wrong done in the "land of opportunity and second chances."

In conclusion: House Bill 6921 will make provisions not only for the 40, 000 people on probation and parole but also for those of us who have been home for a number of years who still struggle to reacclimate to life and overcome these 600 barriers that restrict and confine indefinitely. This bill will also address the racial disparities black and brown communities face along with the stigma of having a criminal record and help reduce the recidivism rate. House Bill 6921 is the epitome of Criminal Justice reform and Connecticut will be on the cutting edge as the first state to propose and pass this legislation

I am in support of HB 6921 An Act Concerning Discrimination Based on a Person's Criminal History.

Thank you.

Ms. Tiheba Bain