



Connecticut Students for a Dream
Empower. Educate. Advocate.

Testimony to the Labor and Public Employees Committee of the CT Legislature

February 26th, 2019

**Testimony in support of H.B. 6921: An Act Concerning Discrimination Based on a Person's
Criminal History**

Honorable Chairs and Members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee of the
Connecticut General Assembly:

We, Connecticut Students for a Dream (C4D), strongly call on the members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee to pass H.B. 6921: An Act Concerning Discrimination Based on a Person's Criminal History. The Connecticut Legislature must pass legislation that prohibit discrimination based on a person's criminal history.

C4D is a statewide, youth-led network that fights for the rights of undocumented youth and their families. We are proud to be the only organization in Connecticut that is led by and for immigrant youth directly impacted by the issues we seek to address.

The current criminal justice system is broken; it disproportionately targets and incarcerates people of color behind bars. We can see that by the fact that while black and latinos only make up 29% of the country's population they are 59% of those who are incarcerated¹. Its undeniable that this broken system that has disproportionately targeted people of color more than others; "among black males born in 2001, one in three will go to prison at some point during their lifetimes; one in six Latino males will have the same fate. By contrast, only 1 out of every 17 white males is expected to go to prison. A similar pattern exists among women: 1 in 111 white women, 1 in 18 black women, and 1 in 45 Latina women will go to prison at some point"². This broken system has created a War on Drugs which disproportionately affects people of color, the black and latino population comprise 62% of those incarcerated for drug offenses despite their white counterparts using drugs at similar rates³.

As a result of this broken and racist system, a significant portion of individuals attempting to re-enter society after serving time are people of color, making this not only a

¹ Initiative, Prison Policy. "United States Profile." States of Incarceration: The Global Context 2016 | Prison Policy Initiative. Accessed February 26, 2019

² Hagler, Jamal. "8 Facts You Should Know About the Criminal Justice System and People of Color." Center for American Progress. October 20, 2015. Accessed February 26, 2019. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/race/news/2015/05/28/113436/8-facts-you-should-know-about-the-criminal-justice-system-and-people-of-color/>.

³ Hagler, Jamal. "8 Facts You Should Know About the Criminal Justice System and People of Color." Center for American Progress. October 20, 2015. Accessed February 26, 2019



Connecticut Students for a Dream

Empower. Educate. Advocate.

criminal justice issue, but also a racial issue. When individuals have gone through the system and served their time, they are met with significant barriers in everyday aspects of their life, they face discrimination in accessing education, housing, insurance, and state programs. The discrimination is often marked by an individual needing to disclose their criminal history. For instance in applying to higher education applicants often need to check a box that informs the university of one's criminal history. According to a 2010 study by the Center for Community Alternatives, out of 273 higher education institutions, "66% reported that they collect information about applicants' criminal justice history, while only 40% of those schools trained staff on how to interpret those results"⁴. Consequently, because of this people may not be judge by their merits and instead be discriminated against.

CT Students for a Dream views this bill (H.B. 6921) as an important step in protecting the rights of our black and brown communities and a vital step toward making our state safer, stronger, and fairer. The majority of C4D's membership are young people of color, in addition to having to deal with the consequences of their immigration status, they must also deal with a system that is already stacked against them due to their skin color in the eyes of the criminal justice system.

People who have been convicted of a crime and earned their chance to reenter society should have a fair shot at getting their lives back on track without having their prison sentence held against them. Everyone deserves a second chance, and all of us are safer when people have that chance to succeed.

On behalf of the C4D Community,

Jonathan Gonzalez-Cruz
Policy Coordinator
Connecticut Students for a Dream

⁴ 681, Rev. Vivian Nixon. "Criminal Records Create More than Financial Barriers to Higher Education." The Huffington Post. April 06, 2017. Accessed February 26, 2019. https://www.huffingtonpost.com/rev-vivian-nixon/criminal-records-create-m_b_9618896.html.