

February 25, 2019

Members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee, Chairs Porter and Kushner:

I am the Rev. Josh Pawelek, minister of the Unitarian Universalist Society: East in Manchester, and a resident of Glastonbury. I am writing to express my support for House Bill 6921, AN ACT CONCERNING DISCRIMINATION BASED ON A PERSON'S CRIMINAL HISTORY.

Over the past few decades, Connecticut has made solid progress in reforming its criminal justice system so that sentencing is more fair and the treatment of minors is more developmentally appropriate. However, like all states and the federal government, Connecticut's criminal justice system carries many vestiges of earlier racist and discriminatory structures and practices. (As general background for understanding the history of these structures and practices, I recommend Carol Anderson's *White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of our Racial Divide*, and Michelle Alexander's *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*.)

How do these vestiges live on in Connecticut? Despite our progress, Connecticut residents with criminal histories face more than 600 legal barriers to meeting their basic needs, such as housing, employment, education, health insurance, life insurance, access to credit and on and on. With such barriers in place, people with criminal histories find it difficult to reintegrate into society. They find it difficult to care for their families. They tend to struggle economically. They are at risk of re-offending in order to survive. With such barriers in place, our system is continuing to punish people long after they have completed their original sentence. This unfair, unjust, and undemocratic.

HB 6921 addresses this situation. It seeks to reduce these barriers by expanding the scope of Connecticut's anti-discrimination laws to prohibit discrimination on the basis of criminal history. Areas to which this prohibition would apply include employment, housing, public education and accommodations, insurance, credit transactions, public programs and services, and economic development programs.

I support this bill as a matter of principle. Unitarian Universalism's first principle is "respect for the inherent worth and dignity of every person." When an individual is legally barred from housing, education, employment, and meeting many other basic needs for themselves and their families, the state is slowly stripping their dignity from them. I support HB 6921 because it seeks to restore dignity to people with criminal histories by making it possible for them to cultivate productive, contributory and meaningful lives. I hope you'll support HB 6921 as well. Let's stop the needless punishment of people who've already been punished.

Respectfully submitted,

Rev. Josh Pawelek
60 Wagon Rd.
Glastonbury, CT 06033
(860) 652-8961
revpawelek@gmail.com