



SUPPORTING HB 6921, AN ACT CONCERNING DISCRIMINATION BASED ON A PERSON'S CRIMINAL HISTORY

Good Morning Representative Porter, Senator Kushner, and members of the Committee, my name is Becky Simonsen and I am a Lead Organizer with the Service Employees International Union District 1199 New England. I am submitting testimony in support of **HB 6921**. Our union represents 26,000 health care workers across the public and private sectors in Connecticut. The majority of our members – working in state human services, nursing homes, group homes, hospitals, and home care – are women of color. Connecticut, like every other state in this nation, disproportionately arrests and incarcerates Black and brown people, which disproportionately harms our members' families and communities. The passage of **HB 6921** would ease many of the obstacles that formerly incarcerated individuals face to re-integration and would be a significant step towards addressing the long-term damages of mass incarceration in our members' communities.

1199 also represents all 600 front line health care workers in the Connecticut Department of Corrections. Our members working in Connecticut's prisons are doctors, nurses, psychiatrists, social workers, and other health care professionals who, despite a severe staffing crisis, care for the medical and mental health needs of inmates.

1199 members in Corrections care for a population with acute medical and mental health illnesses that are often the direct result of systemic afflictions of homelessness, poverty, and opioid addiction. Our members must uphold a constitutional mandate to treat and rehabilitate these individuals while they serve their sentences. 1199 members help inmates cope with histories of trauma, abuse, and addiction and attempt to best give them the tools they need to re-enter our communities, find work, and provide for their families.

Yet the constant pattern of recidivism prevents our members from helping most inmates from permanently transitioning back into our communities. The latest OPM report on recidivism in Connecticut found that 60 percent of the inmates who left prison in 2014 were re-arrested for a new offense within three years of their release.¹ And a recent study confirmed that Black men are re-incarcerated more often and more quickly than all other groups.²

¹ <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/4381735-2018-OPM-Recidivism-Report.html>

² Katie Ropes Berry, Stephanie C. Kennedy, Margaret Lloyd, Chris A. Veeh & Stephen J. Tripodi (2018) The Intersectional Effects of Race and Gender on Time to Reincarceration, Justice Quarterly, DOI: [10.1080/07418825.2018.1524508](https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2018.1524508)

Connecticut residents with a criminal record face over 600 systemic barriers to re-integration into society – through limited access to housing, loans, employment, and education – driving these cycles of recidivism. Ending discrimination for people with a criminal record would best allow 1199 members to *truly* assist incarcerated individuals in attaining the security and stability they need to stay out of the carceral system for good.

Connecticut has sought to become a “Second Chance Society.” Without expanding our anti-discrimination laws so residents with a criminal record can gain a foothold towards economic security, this vision is only possible for the lucky, wealthy few. It is time for Connecticut to truly live up to this vision for the rest of us; it is time to pass **HB 6921**.