

Social Economic Networkers

Testimony of Marjorie Swanke

In support of 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." thank you for allowing me to present testimony to you today. My name is Marjorie Swanke and I served 30 months in York correctional Institute.

I am here representing Social Economic Networkers which are an International organization that works to improve the economic well-being of people by helping them run their own businesses and have dignity and integrity. This is important because this organization does not discriminate against people who have a criminal record. We support House Bill 6921

Prison life is traumatic and reentering the community and adjusting to normal life is hard. The treatment we receive as formerly incarcerated people makes it much harder to adjust mentally, emotionally, economically, and spiritually.

Probation is part of this for me. I am in the second year of my five year probation sentence. Probation has only served to hold me back and make me feel like I am still partly in prison and less than human. The first months of probation require that you go to classes set up by the probation system two days a week. There is no way out of this. This means that anyone lucky enough to get a regular job or get to enroll in classes may not get to do so because of a conflict in schedules. That's just holding people back. Why do you need to miss getting a job because you have to attend classes about getting a job?

For me, I have complied completely with the terms of my probation, yet I have only recently received limited permission to leave the state of Connecticut for my work with Social Economic Networkers. This restricted and continues to restrict my ability to run my business, make contacts and money.

I have never taken or sold an illegal drug in my entire life, yet I constantly have to give urine samples with an officer watching me even at times when I had my period. This is discriminatory to me because there is no mention of drugs anywhere in my case. Being under suspicion is very intrusive depressing and demeaning.

I want to talk now about discrimination that people with a criminal record encounter.

Part of the criminal justice system is supposedly rehabilitation, but the roadblocks that people with a criminal record experience when they leave prison make it's very difficult for them to succeed. Getting a job is very hard because employers discriminate. I have taken many classes to qualify for a variety of jobs, but cannot get a job even in this booming job market.

I also have been denied credit and access to educational programs specifically because of my criminal record. My husband pays for the insurance on our cars. Otherwise, I might not have been able to have a

car to use. I am one of the lucky ones who have family support system who have helped me financially and emotionally.

In conclusion it is unimaginable to think people who have a criminal record, cannot find work, get credit, or insurance, and are denied education, or something so important and as basic as a place to live. My criminal record should be held against me as to whether or not I live with basic human needs to in order to support my family. The roadblocks of discrimination are an interconnected web to recidivism. If you can't get a job then maybe you can't get credit, without credit it's hard to purchase a reliable car, which makes it much harder to find work. The vicious continues because without work everything suffers.

All we want, and need is an opportunity to rebuild and move on with our lives to have a future. HB 6921 will benefit our communities by having more productive and self supporting members with fewer needing aid or returning to prison.

I am in support of HB 6921 an act concerning discrimination based on person's criminal History. Please, please vote in support of this bill to end discrimination based on a people a criminal history.

Thank you.

Marjorie Swanke