

Housing Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-6431

AN ACT CONCERNING HOUSING OPPORTUNITIES FOR JUSTICE-

Title: IMPACTED PERSONS.

Vote Date: 3/11/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 2/18/2021

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Housing Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

Currently, many justice-impacted individuals face housing insecurity due to discriminatory practices. This bill would seek to address the intersection that exists between the homeless population and the justice-impacted population with the goal of increasing housing equity.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Tanya Hughes- Executive Director of the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities-
SUPPORTS CONDITIONALLY – stating support for the goals of the bill with regards to helping those with criminal records re-enter society. However, the current bill makes it so those who commit misdemeanors are grouped together with those who commit felonies with regards to the 10-year lookback period. This provision could harm those with less serious offenses for no discernable reason. Furthermore, lines 77-90 of Section 2 lack clarity: it refers to crimes that would "adversely affect the health, safety, or welfare of other tenants," but only provides a non-exhaustive list of the kind of crimes included.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Michael Anderson- **SUPPORTS** – stating the denial of housing to an ex-felon makes it more difficult for them to move on with their life after they are released.

Tara Buchholz- **SUPPORTS** – stating she was formerly incarcerated but was able to secure a good job with good benefits. However, despite having a job, she had difficulty finding stable

housing. Oftentimes the security deposit would be 2-3 times greater than normal, and landlords would refuse to rent to her based on her criminal record.

Rev. Dr. Shannon Clarkson- **SUPPORTS** – stating discrimination against those with criminal convictions makes it harder for them to re-enter society and become productive citizens.

Peter Diaz, Jr. - **SUPPORTS** – stating he has a criminal record and has had difficulty finding housing.

Kathleen Flaherty- Executive Director of the CT Legal Rights Project- **SUPPORTS** – stating a justice-impacted person's inability to find housing post-incarceration reduces their opportunities to successfully re-enter society.

Sarah Fox- Director of Policy at the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness- **SUPPORTS** – stating re-entry is extremely difficult in the best of times. People exiting prison face a host of barriers and stigma. They face barriers to housing. Since 2016, 3,5000 people experiencing homelessness have had an encounter with Department of Corrections.

Sean Ghio- Policy Director of the Partnership for Strong Communities- **SUPPORTS** – stating that denial of housing due to a criminal record disproportionately affects people of color. Easing the housing barriers these people face would help put them on the right path to rehabilitation.

Salum Kazerounian- Staff Attorney at the Connecticut Fair Housing Center- **SUPPORTS** – stating more than 100 million Americans have some of criminal record. Because of the racial disparities present in the criminal justice system, people of color are more likely to be affected by the lack of access to stable housing that many justice-impacted persons face. Furthermore, the lookback period should be based on the time of the offense, not the person's release from prison. Finally, research shows that a person is much less likely to recommit after 5-7 years of the offense, and the lookback period should reflect this reality.

Caroline Lawrence- Transitions Medical-Legal Partnership- **SUPPORTS** – stating the bill is an important step towards reducing the barriers formerly incarcerated people face.

Anika Lemar- **SUPPORTS** – stating the bill advances housing equity and access.

Gus Marks-Hamilton- Interim Smart Justice Campaign Manager for the ACLU-CT- **SUPPORTS** – stating all people have a right to housing, regardless of their criminal background. Research suggest that a criminal offense has little to no impact on housing incomes.

Robert Michaelman- Program Manager at the Chrysalis Center, Inc. - **SUPPORTS** – stating formerly incarcerated people face barriers to stable housing. This is caused by both implicit and explicit biases. Housing is a basic need, and this population needs to be housed as they have already served the punishment for their crimes.

Allyce Pace, MSW- Housing Coordinator for My Sister's Place for the Young Adult Services- **SUPPORTS** – stating housing is a basic human need. A person cannot successfully reintegrate into society if they do not have access to this basic need.

Nick Pellitta- Law Student Intern at the New Haven Legal Assistance Association-
SUPPORTS – stating people with records have trouble acquiring safe and stable housing. This bill is an important step towards ensuring those with records have productive futures.

Cindy Prizio- Executive Director for One Standard of Justice- **SUPPORTS** – stating the bill does not go far enough towards ensuring rights for justice-impacted individuals. Recidivism for those convicted of sex crimes is low, and unnecessarily hampers their ability to find housing after there are released from prison.

Robert Sharp- **SUPPORTS** – stating people convicted of crimes seeking housing should receive assistance. Not helping them find housing pushes them towards recommitting crime.

Christie Stewart- Director of Fairfield County's Center for Housing Opportunity- **SUPPORTS** – stating 50% of those who experience homelessness have a criminal record. This bill would be a positive step towards decreasing homelessness and increasing housing equity.

Julia Wilcox- CT Community Nonprofit Alliance- **SUPPORTS** – stating justice-impacted individuals face housing barriers. Nearly half of the people who utilize housing shelters in the state have criminal records. Homelessness itself can make it hard for these individuals to comply with the terms of their parole, putting their freedom in jeopardy.

Jay Williams- President of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving- **SUPPORTS** – stating justice-impacted individuals face many difficulties finding house. From their own evaluation from the Greater Hartford Reentry Welcome Center, more than half of the people who came to the center came for housing assistance. Affordable and stable housing is a key tool to support justice-impacted individuals' futures.

The following from Youth SPEAKS SUPPORT HB 6431, highlighting the difficult that those with a criminal record face when they go searching for housing. The bill would help these people get back on their feet after exiting prison:

Michael Grate

Vincent Hatten

Lois Lawson

Reyna Sanabria

Jacqueline Swagerty

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Adam Bonoff- **OPPOSES** – stating landlord's need to have the ability to protect tenants from dangerous individuals.

Kyle Campbell- **OPPOSES** – stating the bill would make it harder to do business in the state.

Pete D'Amato- **OPPOSES** – stating HUD has already issued guidelines about using criminal records in tenant screening. Current federal policy works, the state should not interfere.

Joseph D'Ascoli- President of the Connecticut Chapter of the National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials- **OPPOSES AS WRITTEN** – stating while the organization supports the goal of the bill, public housing authorities must comply with federal law.

Bob De Cosmo- **OPPOSES** – stating the reason people with criminal records cannot find housing is not due to their records, but due to a lack of job history. This bill would not rectify the issue and would instead make it harder for landlords to screen tenants.

Naomi Freeman- **OPPOSES** – stating the bill would limit a landlord's ability to protect tenants.

Phil Gerardo- **OPPOSES** – stating he does not want to be forced to rent to people who have committed serious crimes.

Mike Gregor- **OPPOSES** – stating people who have committed felonies should "face the consequences of their actions," and that the 10-year lookback period is arbitrary.

David Haberfeld- **OPPOSES** – stating the bill would limit a landlord's ability to screen prospective tenants. Since 1/3 of those with records reoffend, landlords need to be able to assess risk.

William Harris- **OPPOSES** – stating the bill would put tenants at risk.

Chad Heindenis- **OPPOSES** – stating people have a right not to live next to a felon.

Robert Jackson- **OPPOSES** – stating the state should not decide whom a landlord rents their property to.

Paul Januszewski- **OPPOSES** – stating people with a criminal record should not be a protected class. This bill would make it more costly for landlords to rent out their properties. Finally, he states that people with records are denied housing because a lack of job history, not because of the record itself.

Scott Kibbe- **OPPOSES** – stating the bill would make running a business more difficult.

Carl Lupinacci- Greater Bridgeport Property Owners Association- **OPPOSES** – stating the bill would make it harder for landlords to do business in the state.

Xiong Mo- **OPPOSES** – stating landlords need to be able to screen prospective tenants.

Maureen Monaco- **OPPOSES** – stating her obligation is to protect current tenants.

Carlos Mouta- **OPPOSES** – stating that while he empathizes with the needs of those with criminal records, his first priority is to provide safe housing to his tenants.

Eric Polinsky- **OPPOSES** – stating the bill would give protection to those convicted of crimes to the detriment of the landlords and their tenants.

Steve Portera- **OPPOSES** – stating the bill puts landlord's, their family, and their tenants at risk.

Lorraine Potvin- **OPPOSES** – stating landlords must have the right to protect themselves and their tenants by choosing who they rent to.

Yinghui Qin- **OPPOSES** – stating the bill would be dangerous for landlords and their tenants.

Tara Ramlal - **OPPOSES** – stating the bill would put existing tenants at risk. The state should not be giving protections to those convicted of a crime.

Caroline Raynis- **OPPOSES** – stating that while she believes in giving second chances to those who are convicted of crimes, current HUD guidelines already give tenants some protection from housing discrimination.

Stephen Rajniak- **OPPOSES** – stating the bill addresses a "non-existent problem" and would end up putting current tenants at risk.

Jay Roux- **OPPOSES** – stating rents would go up as a result. He then states, "felons create victims," and are not victims themselves.

John Souza- President of the CT Coalition of Property Owners- **OPPOSES** – stating creating a protected class for those with criminal records would increase costs for landlords. The lookback period should be based on the release from prison, not from the crime. Finally, landlords should receive civil immunity for any injury arising from a crime committed by a tenant.

James Sun- **OPPOSES** – stating the bill makes it harder for landlords to protect tenants.

Terry Walker- **OPPOSES** – stating the bill would harm landlords.

Julie-Cherie West- **OPPOSES** – stating criminals should not be a protected class; committing a crime is a choice, not an inherent trait.

Bo Yang - **OPPOSES** – stating landlords need to be able to screen prospective tenants in order to protect existing tenants.

Lin Yang- **OPPOSES** – stating the bill would be dangerous for vulnerable tenants.

Jen Zakrzewski- **OPPOSES** – stating the bill would increase rent and force landlords to rent to child molesters.

Reported by: Gabriel Turco

Date: 3/29/21