



ST. STEPHEN'S  
EPISCOPAL CHURCH OF RIDGEFIELD

*Belonging with purpose*

Written Testimony Submitted to the Connecticut General Assembly Joint Committee on Judiciary **in support of Raised Senate Bill No. 1019: An Act Concerning The Board Of Pardons And Paroles, Erasure Of Criminal Records For Certain Misdemeanor And Felony Offenses, Prohibiting Discrimination Based On Erased Criminal History Record Information And Concerning the Recommendations of the Connecticut Sentencing Commission with Respect to Misdemeanor Sentences**

To the Honorable Senator Winfield, the Honorable Representative Stafstrom, and distinguished members of the Joint Committee on Judiciary:

My name is the Rev. Whitney Altopp. I'm the Rector (head pastor) of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Ridgefield, CT and I'm writing in support of the Senate Bill No. 1019

I live in a predominantly white and wealthy suburb and I strongly believe in the Clean Slate bill. The Clean Slate bill will make greater opportunities for people who have paid their price in society to be returned to society as contributors. This bill is something that I believe in rather than fear because I believe in people. My faith reminds me that we can all be redeemed. Those who have done their time and paid the price should not have to explain their transformation or defend their honor after they have endured the penalty. Furthermore, having the opportunity to engage life with a clean slate allows folks to move forward in faith, rather than being haunted by a bad decision or unfortunate circumstance. Each of us wants to know that our sins are forgiven.

Over my years in pastoral ministry, I have worked with people who were incarcerated. In some cases, I believe that they were actually innocent and caught in society's noble attempt to "get rid of the bad guys." This burden has followed them beyond the moment of injustice toward them. We must recognize that our justice system sometimes makes mistakes, and that mistake shouldn't be theirs to bear for their lifetime. The following data points make this clear: [If not for mass incarceration](#) and the collateral consequences of a criminal record, the U.S. poverty rate could have dropped a full 20% between 1980 and 2004. [In 2014, the employment penalty](#) for felony convictions cost the U.S. economy 1.9 million workers.

Sincerely,

The Rev. Whitney Altopp