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OSJ is a volunteer-based civil rights organization committed to ensuring that persons accused or convicted of sexual offenses in Connecticut are treated constitutionally and fairly by the state before, during, and after their sentences. We believe communities are safer with rational laws and with a focus on prevention of sexual harm and the healing of all those affected by it. We believe any sexual offense is one too many.

SB1019 - 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

Testimony Opposing Exclusions in Raised Senate Bill 1019

Good morning Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom and all esteemed members of the Judiciary Committee.

My internet crime happened in 2012 and resulted in a Class D felony conviction. It was a one-time, isolated incident that I never meant to commit but must live with the consequences my entire life. I learned a very difficult lesson that day. I accept my accountability, wish I had used better judgement, and should have been more aware of my surroundings.

My entire life, I have always taken pride in doing what is best for others and myself, never posing harm to anyone, and bringing joy to those around me. I graduated from college with a 4 year degree, was very active, played sports, socialized with family and friends, and always worked hard in my career. My parents always taught me to follow the rules, to be the best version of myself possible, to self-improve, and to see the beauty / positiveness in everything.

All that changed in 2012. I had gone through a very difficult time before my crime, losing my father and grandparents. I had used a file sharing network since college, for music, movies, and TV shows. Unfortunately, I did not educate myself enough to understand these file sharing programs, also had unprotected, illegal material, present on the program either disguised or clearly present, in which I carelessly uploaded a few files unintentionally. I was negligent, but I paid the price and took responsibility for my actions.

During my pre-trial period of 1.5 years, I lived in fear, not knowing my future. I had an excellent pre-sentencing investigative report that showed I was never in trouble in my life. I had lost everything prior to being incarcerated – my career, my fiancé (who could not bear my label on the registry due to her work), my car, my 401K, and all my finances which were spent on legal fees and bail. I served my time – one full year in jail and completed my program in prison with success.

I had had a whole year to reflect on everything while being away from my loved ones. Upon release, I faced my greatest challenge. I again had the full, loving support of my friends and family which guided me through my struggles. I moved back into my mother's home, whom has been there every step of the way for me. My family and friends know my true character. They understand I made a huge mistake that day in 2012.

It has been a struggle and unbelievably challenging since my release. In my initial search, I have applied for several hundred jobs, had 40-50 interviews, 95% of which resulted in a job offer, only to be turned down because of my Felony D conviction and being a "sex offender." However, I was persistent and never gave up, eventually landing a temporary job outside my industry. Then, I met a woman who looked past my record and loved me for who I am, how I treated her.

But I would often be reminded of my "scarlet letter" and shunned by people. I noticed a few friends no longer wanted to associate because of my label. Although they knew my true character, they felt embarrassed, especially when they started to have children. We live in a very judgmental society unfortunately.

I would isolate myself, fearing rejection from others, and would not let anyone become close to me. I could no longer be myself and fully live my life, be happy, be comfortable around others, and put myself out there socially. The social distancing everyone is experiencing now with Covid has been my experience since my release in July 2015.

I lost my first job after prison due to the business closing, finding myself anew in the same struggle. It is difficult for someone with a record to land a meaningful job, and I would often face discrimination due to my record, even though I was well qualified for the role, and it would not have any correlation with my crime. I became even more depressed and anxious. I felt suicidal and fearful that this life was going to continue to beat me down and not allow me to recover and have that true second chance.

One day my whole life and perspective changed. I learned I was to be a father. My partner and I have a child together, who is the light of our lives. My child gave me a new and stronger reason to fight not just for me, but for them and to be the best father/role model I can, guide them, protect them. We are planning to develop and grow our family.

Our child is now three, but I am once again living in fear of how I can continue being active in their life with school, activities while being labeled as a "sex offender." My partner is my approved supervisor but cannot always be there. I often withdraw from my child's visits to new pre-school appointments, kids' birthdays, and activities because of town ordinances and fear of backlash from my label with other parents.

My family has already suffered from labeling and being singled out. They have been excluded from activities, such as my partner's Facebook groups, mom gatherings, playground play dates with kids, and even my partner's friends who now have kids. It is not right. They should not pay the price for my crime committed almost 9 years ago.

I served my time in prison, completed my program early with success, in full compliance with probations and the state registry, volunteer at an animal shelter for the past five years, and maintained a full-time job twice in my career, once of which was during the pandemic. In addition, I obtained a certificate of employability from the Board of Pardons, received modification from the courts that my label would not affect me being with my child, and we own our own home.

However, I am limited in being active in my child's life due to my label and want to be the best father I can. I want to achieve my higher goals and potential in life, and not settle or feel trapped due to my record. I am very proud how far I have come with many obstacles and rejections in the way.

I do not want to settle for less in life. I should have the right to compete, achieve like everyone else, and not be turned away because of my record. I cannot obtain a better paying position or move into management for work because of my conviction. I know that if this were truly behind me, I could obtain these goals and provide a better quality of life and security for my family. My family and I should not have to struggle. I am still fighting and deserve a second chance in life.

Respectfully, I ask you this: why don't I deserve that chance by being included in the Clean Slate Bill like others who have committed C and D felonies?

Register in advance for this webinar:

April 12 - Mary Koss PhD et al presents:

Experience from Practicing Restorative Justice for Sex Crimes: Trauma, Justice Needs, Participant Satisfaction, Equity, Law, and the Future.

https://zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_YXf30UzmQ0eIL6f6rK2T_A

Previous webinars:

Webinar Video - Dr. R. Karl Hanson: Sexual offense recidivism risk: Not what you think

<https://OneStandardOfJustice.org/dr-r-karl-hanson-sexual-offense-recidivism-risk-not-what-you-think/>

Webinar Video - Katherine Gotch: Evidence-Based Reform: Finding New Ways Forward

<https://OneStandardOfJustice.org/evidence-based-reform-finding-new-ways-forward/>