

Written Testimony submitted **in support of Raised Senate Bill 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 the Judiciary:

My name is Alan L. Benford. I identify as white and I am a resident of Manchester, a suburban community east of Hartford and part of the Greater Hartford region. I have been attending The Unitarian Universalist Society: East (UUS: East) for 50 years. UUS: East is a member congregation of the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance (GHIAA). While UUS: East is a predominantly white suburban congregation, GHIAA is interfaith, interracial and includes congregations in urban and suburban areas. Together we are advocating for a strong Clean Slate Bill that **includes all misdemeanors and Class C, D, and E felonies, and specifically excludes convictions for sex crimes and family violence.** The bill should be retroactive, and include antidiscrimination protections for people with records. People excluded from the provisions of this bill can still use the existing process through the Board of Pardons and Paroles. I will reiterate that I am a white person and a resident of the suburbs, and I am not afraid of anything this bill will create, for the reasons shown below.

To qualify for expungement under this bill, a person would have to live crime free for a period of years, I assume 3-5 years. Given the burden of a criminal record, living crime free is a major accomplishment. Significant majorities of employers, landlords and colleges check criminal records before making decisions about hiring, renting to or admitting potential candidates. Those are serious difficulties to overcome, and people who succeed in spite of them are determined to succeed, and do not present a danger to society. Those difficulties are even more serious for people of color, given the institutional racism of law enforcement and the judicial system.

The negative impact on society of the present system is serious. It perpetuates a high rate of poverty, People with records have difficulty getting jobs commensurate with their skills, and are not able to advance in their chosen fields. In 2014, 1.9 million workers were lost to productivity because of felony convictions. Homelessness is often related to prior incarceration due to the inability to find a suitable job. Close to half of people in shelters have a criminal record. With expungement, people would be working at better jobs, contributing to the economy and to society by living with their families.

People who are able to live crime free for 3-5 years after fulfilling their sentences are no more likely to commit crimes than the general population. They represent no greater danger to society than any other neighbor. There is no reason to fear that this bill will create any danger by having criminal records expunged, and discrimination removed.

I grew up with a traditional Christian faith which requires that we love our neighbors as we love ourselves. My Unitarian Universalist faith honors my Christian values and promotes “the inherent worth and dignity of every person,” and “justice, equity and compassion in human relations.” All of these are on the side of the intent of this legislation. People who have erred and made amends should not have impediments to their living with dignity and being productive citizens. They should be able to get good jobs, find suitable homes and get an education to improve themselves, their productivity, and to be able to raise their children so they have better opportunities. They should not have their felony conviction continue to be a burden to their productive lives.