

Testimony to the Connecticut General Assembly's Judiciary Committee

In support of Senate Bill No. 1019

3/10/2021

Co-Chairs Sen. Winfield & Rep. Stafstrom; Ranking Members Sen. Kissel & Rep. Fishbein; and esteemed Members of the Judiciary Committee, I am writing **in support of S.B. 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.*

My name is Christine Brown and I am a resident of Fairfield. **I support S.B. 1019** for the automatic erasure of criminal records.

I am influenced in this by my mother, who was a professor at Skidmore College and spent over 20 years working with inmates at Comstock Maximum Security Prison through Skidmore's University Without Walls program. One evening every week she would walk through the metal detectors to teach business classes to inmates. She often said it was one of the most rewarding teaching experiences of her life. My mom loved the students; they were eager to learn and hopeful that a business education could help them get back on their feet once they had served their sentence.

I'm also a member of St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Fairfield where, during Lent two years ago, we had a series of educational sessions on mass incarceration. Several former convicts came to talk to our parish about their experience. It was heartbreaking and quite frankly, maddening that people who had served their time still couldn't get jobs and housing, despite remaining crime-free because the current record expungement process in Connecticut is so onerous and expensive.

Is the point of our prison system solely punishment? Or is it also rehabilitation? Punishment without rehabilitation serves neither the prisoner *nor* society. Anyone who has raised children knows that.

Clean Slate legislation address the rehabilitation part of the equation - the same thing my mother was trying to do by giving prisoners skills they could use to improve their lives once they'd served their time. Clean Slate is both a moral issue and an economic issue.

From a moral viewpoint, mass incarceration has had real, ongoing consequences in Connecticut, disproportionately hurting Black and brown communities in our state, and burdening hundreds of thousands of Connecticut residents with a criminal record that becomes a barrier to employment, housing, occupational licensing, and higher education.

From an economic viewpoint, Clean Slate reduces the tax burden on all of us by helping former convicts become productive, tax-paying members of society. When people have access to jobs, housing, occupational licensing, and higher education, they are more likely to earn higher wages. They're also less likely to recidivate. A study from the University of Michigan Law School found that recidivism rates for people who have had their records expunged are so low that they actually "pose a lower crime risk than the general population as a whole." Why would we not want to lower crime?

With S.B. 1019, Connecticut can **strengthen our economy, improve public safety, and advance racial justice**. I encourage all members of the Judiciary Committee, on both sides of the aisle, to support this important measure. Thank you.

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