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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:

We write from the Collaborative Center for Justice, a Hartford-based social justice organization sponsored by six communities of Catholic women religious across Connecticut. The Collaborative Center is a dues-paying member of the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance (GHIAA), an interfaith organization of over 40 faith-based institutions in Greater Hartford. We wish to express our strong support for S.B. 1019. We enthusiastically support the bill's inclusion of felony convictions and its strong antidiscrimination protections for Clean Slate beneficiaries. We also support carveouts for sex crimes and family violence.

Any record of contact with the criminal legal system, even for a simple arrest that does not result in a conviction, can haunt one for the rest of one's life. According to the National Inventory of Collateral Consequences of Conviction, the state of Connecticut has erected 595 barriers between formerly incarcerated people and full participation in our democracy, economy, and society writ large.¹

Given the economic devastation brought on by the pandemic, and the racially unequal ways in which that devastation has been spread across our state and country, we wish to call special attention to the impacts on jobseekers. All people have a right to provide for themselves, care for their families, and contribute to their communities. A criminal record reduces a job seeker's

¹ National Inventory of Collateral Consequences of Conviction:
<https://niccc.nationalreentryresourcecenter.org/consequences>

chance of getting a callback or job offer by nearly 50 percent.² At a time when our shared economic future depends on getting as many people back to work as possible, the state should remove as many barriers to employment as it can in order to achieve that goal. Additionally, beyond economic benefits, employment can also foster a sense of inclusion in the community and can increase an individual's overall wellbeing.

Burdens associated with a criminal record are especially onerous for people returning to outside society with felony convictions. At the same time, felony convictions are one of the areas where racist disparities in outcomes show up. While only 8% of the U.S. population has a record of a felony conviction, one in three Black men do. In Connecticut, 6% - 8% of the general population has a felony conviction, while 25% - 31% of Black men in Connecticut do.³

For SB 1019 to do justice by Black communities impacted by racist policing and prosecution, legislators must protect the relief provided for most Class C, D, and E felony convictions. The inclusion of felony convictions has to be coupled with the strong antidiscrimination protections articulated in SB 1019. In order for the bill to be effective in the real world, the legislature must maintain and continue to strengthen the antidiscrimination protections in employment, real estate, education, and insurance.

Given the scope of the problem, with a third of American adults having some form of criminal record, we commend the legislature for elevating recipients of clean slate to a protected class.⁴ Without strong antidiscrimination protections, our communities, and indeed our nation, cannot be made whole in the wake of the crisis of mass incarceration.

We proudly echo the words of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops year 2000 statement on criminal justice reform, "Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice," saying:

Just as God never abandons us, so too we must be in covenant with one another. We are all sinners, and our response to sin and failure should not be abandonment and despair, but rather justice, contrition, reparation, and return or reintegration of all into the community.⁵

Prison is itself punishment. It is dehumanizing. It is violent. It is morally wrong for the state, after all of that, to continue to punish its citizens as they attempt to rebuild their

² "Sequencing Disadvantage: Barriers to Employment Facing Young Black Men and White Men with Criminal Records." https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/pager/files/annals_sequencingdisadvantage.pdf

³ "Demographic Patterns of Cumulative Arrest Prevalence By Ages 18 and 23".

[https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4443707/#:~:text=Assuming%20the%20missing%20cases%20are,males%20have%20been%20arrested%20\(vs.&text=This%20study%20indicates%20that%20the,evenly%20distributed%20across%20the%20population.](https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4443707/#:~:text=Assuming%20the%20missing%20cases%20are,males%20have%20been%20arrested%20(vs.&text=This%20study%20indicates%20that%20the,evenly%20distributed%20across%20the%20population.)

⁴ "Barriers to Work: People with Criminal Records." <https://www.ncsl.org/research/labor-and-employment/barriers-to-work-individuals-with-criminal-records.aspx>

⁵ "Responsibility, Rehabilitation, and Restoration: A Catholic Perspective on Crime and Criminal Justice." <https://www.usccb.org/resources/responsibility-rehabilitation-and-restoration-catholic-perspective-crime-and-criminal>

lives on the outside. Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

Respectfully,

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