

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 Reverend Chris Dion. I live in East Granby, CT and serve Shepherd of the Hills Lutheran Church in Simsbury, CT and Christ the King Lutheran Church in Windsor, CT and I support **S.B. 1019** for the automatic erasure of criminal records. A clean slate would automatically expunge the criminal records of people who have returned to society and remained **crime free** for a period of time, so, rather than weaken the state of Connecticut's economy by excluding working-aged people from the workforce after they have been released from prison for low level felonies, they could be able to support their families and themselves, live in healthy environments and be productive members of society if S.B. No. 1019 is passed.

However, for too long, people, who have paid their debt to society, have had to continue a life sentence of poverty (a criminal record reduces a job seeker's chance of getting a callback or job offer by **nearly 50 percent**); and endure the inability to secure housing (**nearly half** the people in Connecticut's shelters have been incarcerated); or even further their education because nationally, most employers (**90%**), landlords (**80%**), and colleges (**60%**) use background checks.

Those who have served prison time for misdemeanors and low level felonies have experienced retributive justice. They have been punished. It's time to allow them to be restored to society as well, with opportunities (for their families too) to thrive.

At a time in our country and in our state when awareness of racism is so heightened, the justice system is under a microscope, and hidden or ignored facts about how our brothers and sisters of color are disproportionately targeted have been revealed. Here in Connecticut, 25% - 31% of Black men have a felony conviction. This is driven, in part, by the fact that Black and Latinx people continue to receive harsher and longer sentences for the same crimes as white people.

I have faith in a God who taught that when one member of society hurts, we all hurt. My God's mission is to set the prisoners free. Once they have completed their sentences, our justice system, as it is, does **not** set them free. Won't you improve our state, reduce poverty, strengthen these vulnerable families, fight against racism, and allow for the restoration of the formerly incarcerated by expunging their record and allowing them a clean slate?

I have faith in those of you who work hard to make Connecticut a safe and prosperous state for as many people as possible. My fear is not that the formerly incarcerated will get jobs, achieve higher education and secure healthy housing. My fear is not having S.B. 1019 pass and the same biased-driven problems continue to plague our state at a time when we're being overwhelmed by plagues. I implore you: please let those people with records of misdemeanors and low level felonies truly go free. Thank you!

Rev. Chris J. Dion

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