

The Rev. Dr. Donald L. Hamer
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TO: The Honorable Senator Winfield, the Honorable Representative Stafstrom, and distinguished members of the Joint Committee on Judiciary:
judtestimony@cga.ct.gov.

RE: "Clean Slate Bill" (S.B. 1019)

I wholeheartedly support Raised Senate Bill No. 1019 because it would include all misdemeanors and Class C, D, and E felonies (convictions for 10 years or less), excluding convictions for sex crimes and family violence; apply retroactively; and include antidiscrimination protections for people with criminal records.

As a White person who was born and raised in Glastonbury, and a pastor who served a major downtown Hartford congregation for more than 15 years, I have witnessed firsthand the devastating ways that a single mistake can bring down on a human life.

I have pastored the people who, time after time, have a productive, promising first interview for a new job, only to get knocked out after the background check. I have pastored the people who, time after time, cannot find suitable housing for themselves and their families because, after a promising first interview with a landlord, they are denied acceptance after the background check.

To experience any of these setbacks once is disappointing. To experience them time and again as a way of life is heartbreaking and destructive of the human spirit, destroying self-confidence, self-respect and eventually any aspiration to "do better." It turns potentially productive citizens into swelling numbers on the rolls for public assistance and the homeless.

Passing a robust, inclusive clean slate bill would acknowledge and strengthen the important, yet seldom honored, rehabilitative function of our criminal justice system. It would allow people who have already been punished to support themselves, provide for their families, and contribute to their communities. It also would address the scourge of systemic racism in that our present system negatively impacts persons and communities of color and other ethnic minorities. And, for people of any faith tradition, it would lift up the notions of acknowledgement, repentance and redemption that so many of us proclaim in our faith but seldom practice or experience in everyday life.

I urge the committee to approve bill and move it on for passage by the entire State Legislature.

Respectfully submitted,


Donald L. Hamer