

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 Philip Kent from Congregation Mishkan Israel in Hamden, CT. I'm a litigator, educator and co-chair with Dr. Asti Jackson of the Criminal Justice Reform Team of Congregations Organized for a New Connecticut or CONECT. I support SB 1019 and ask that you vote for it.

In CT, if you have a record, you can't really reenter society. The Clean Slate bill automatically expunges eligible misdemeanors and low level felonies for people who remain crime free. It impacts hundreds of thousands who live with the stigma of a record that locks them into serving a life sentence **after** leaving prison because they are unable to secure better jobs, adequate housing and higher education.

Clean Slate is about redemption for formerly incarcerated people, but it is also a racial justice issue. In CT, we allow 60% of people to be jobless one year out from release. Thousands leave prison each year but most have no legal way to support themselves. If you do get work you typically are under-employed, under-housed and under-educated for life. People of color are up to nine times more likely than whites to be jailed in CT. So people of color and their families are far more likely to live in a permanent second class status. But when we lift people up we all do better because under the existing system CT loses an estimated \$1.2 Billion annually in economic activity.

There has been too little change while race-based fear intensifies and racial disparities grow. Racism is a public health emergency, an economic crisis and a moral abyss we all must work to overcome, because overlooking and sidestepping racism is not acceptable. We need to recognize that the current pardon system is broken. It's an onerous, expensive process that serves only about 3% of those eligible for a pardon. If all eligible people applied it would take literally hundreds of years to process. The system is simply inadequate to

serve the need. Clean Slate helps to change that and, by giving people a real second chance, actually improves public safety.

Voting for Clean Slate requires your leadership at a critical time. This bill addresses a moral imperative to remove the many barriers to true reentry into society. We need our legislators to act in a truly bipartisan way, as they have in other states that have passed Clean Slate laws, and vote Yes on SB 1019.

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