

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 Ilana Ofgang and I am a resident of Bridgeport. **I support S.B. 1019** for the automatic erasure of criminal records. 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. Records present barriers to employment, housing, occupational licensing, and higher education. **9 in 10 employers, 4 in 5 landlords, and 3 in 4 colleges** use background checks. Clean Slate will automatically expunge the records of people who have served their time, returned to our communities, and remained crime-free. A criminal record should not be a lifetime sentence. **Clean Slate makes communities safer.** When people have access to jobs, housing, occupational licensing, and higher education, they are more likely to earn higher wages, and 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.”

Personally, I have seen a loved one struggle to rebuild their life after serving their time, with their criminal record being a barrier to employment. And, because of the length of their sentence, they struggled with this at an older age which made getting a job even harder. Professionally, when I was working as an attorney doing habeas corpus appeals as assigned counsel, I remember my very first client, upon his release, sharing his optimism about getting a job and closing a dark chapter of his life. I remember the feeling of my heart tightening beneath my chest when he called me again several months later, his tone changed to one of despair, telling me he could not find work because of his record, and there was nothing I could do or say to help. This is not how it should be. 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.

Ilana Ofgang, Bridgeport