

Testimony in support of SB 1019: An Act Concerning The Board Of Pardons And Paroles, Erasure Of Criminal Records For Certain Misdemeanor And Felony Offenses And Prohibiting Discrimination Based On Erased Criminal History Record Information.

I thank the Chairs and members of the Judiciary Committee for the opportunity to submit testimony. My name is Lawrence Rizzolo. I offer a brief history to provide context and then speak to the unfairness created by mass incarceration that SB 1019 hopes to mitigate.

A history of legal and cultural racism led to the current wealth disparities and extreme segregation in Connecticut. Rather than de facto segregation, Black Americans were consigned to undesirable neighborhoods by explicitly racist laws and customs. The Homeowners' Loan Corporation offered color coded maps to help banks determine where they could make loans. Realtors would not show homes to Blacks in these neighborhoods, regardless of their ability to pay. Predatory realtors would scare Whites who had a Black family on their block into moving out before the value of their home decreased. Realtors would then buy properties at reduced rates and sell them to Blacks at inflated rates. After World War II, the GI bill supported education and housing for returning veterans. The law explicitly excluded Black GIs. Government would not insure bank mortgages for Blacks. Instead, Blacks were offered lease-to-buy loans with unfavorable terms. To make rent, Blacks would sublet to many families and skimp on maintenance. Their investment was lost if they couldn't keep up with payments. Even though housing was available in White neighborhoods, Blacks were forced into multifamily, high-density neighborhoods. In the 1960s and 1970s, discriminatory zoning ordinances required minimum lot and house sizes, specified housing types and construction materials, and even minimum dollar values. The ordinances kept out lower-income people and were directed at minorities, primarily at Black Americans, as opposed to poor Whites. Race neutral language was and continues to be used, as exhaustively documented in [The New Jim Crow](#) and [The Color of Law](#) (Alexander and West 2012; Rothstein 2017). A [recent report in the Hartford Courant](#) illustrated this by comparing West Hartford to Bloomfield.

Despite these inequities, substance abuse was no more prevalent in inner-city and suburban neighborhoods until the War-on-Drugs began in the early 1970's.(Alexander and West 2012) Whereas white and middle-income youth are treated by the "social welfare arm of the state," youth in segregated neighborhoods are charged as felons (Wildeman 2012; Alexander and West 2012; Blankenship et al. 2018; Cloud, Parsons, and Delany-Brumsey 2014). Once labeled as "felons", they are branded for life with limited job opportunities, unqualified for public housing, unable to support their families, and often resort to crime in a vicious cycle.

In many ways, the timeframes found in SB 1019 are too restrictive. Nonetheless, SB 1019 is a good start on rectifying the effects of past laws that, wittingly or not, had very racist effects. Maintaining the "felon" status of the incarcerated and paroled after they served their time perpetuates impoverished neighborhoods by inhibiting upward mobility. Prisons are expensive to operate, as are social services for the impoverished. All of Connecticut benefits by helping those trapped in the system bootstrap their way out of this vicious cycle.

Thank you.

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