

In Support of SB 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

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee, my name is Rebecca Simonsen and I am a Vice President with the Service Employees International Union District 1199 New England.

I am submitting testimony in support of **SB 1019**. Our union represents 26,000 health care workers across the public and private sectors in Connecticut. The majority of our members – working in state human services, nursing homes, group homes, hospitals, and home care – are women of color. Connecticut, like every other state in this nation, disproportionately arrests and incarcerates Black and brown people, which disproportionately harms our members’ families and communities. The passage of **SB 1019**, a version of “Clean Slate” legislation, would ease several of the obstacles that many formerly incarcerated individuals face to re-integration into and would be a significant step towards addressing the long-term damages of mass incarceration in our members’ communities. I strongly urge the Committee to pass the most expansive version of “Clean Slate” legislation, which would benefit not only people with criminal records, but all the residents of Connecticut.

In addition to the health care professionals listed above, 1199 also represents all 600 front line health care workers in the Connecticut Department of Corrections. Our members working in Connecticut’s prisons are doctors, nurses, psychiatrists, social workers, and other health care professionals who, despite a severe staffing crisis, care for the medical and mental health needs of inmates.

Furthermore, 1199 members in Corrections care for a population with acute medical and mental health illnesses that are often the direct result of systemic afflictions of homelessness, poverty, and opioid addiction. Our members must uphold a constitutional mandate to treat and rehabilitate these individuals while they serve their sentences. 1199 members help inmates cope with histories of trauma, abuse, and addiction and attempt to best give them the tools they need to re-enter our communities, find work, and provide for their families.

Yet the constant pattern of recidivism prevents our members from helping most inmates from permanently transitioning back into our communities. The latest OPM report on recidivism in Connecticut found that 60 percent of the inmates who left prison in 2014 were re-arrested for a new offense within three years of their release.¹ And a recent study confirmed that Black men are re-incarcerated more often and more quickly than all other groups.²

Connecticut residents with a criminal record face over 550 systemic barriers to re-integration into society – such as limited access to housing, loans, employment, and education – which drive these cycles of recidivism. Providing a path for the erasure of criminal records is a strong step forward towards ending discrimination against those with a criminal record. Ending discrimination for people with a criminal record would best allow 1199 members to *truly* assist incarcerated individuals in attaining the security and stability they need to stay out of the carceral system for good.

Connecticut has sought to become a “Second Chance Society.” Without taking legislative action so residents with a criminal record can gain a foothold towards economic security, this vision is only possible for the lucky, wealthy few. It is time for Connecticut to truly live up to this vision for the rest of us; it is time to pass **SB 1019**.

Thank you.

¹ <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/4381735-2018-OPM-Recidivism-Report.html>

² Katie Ropes Berry, Stephanie C. Kennedy, Margaret Lloyd, Chris A. Veeh & Stephen J. Tripodi (2018) The Intersectional Effects of Race and Gender on Time to Reincarceration, Justice Quarterly, DOI: [10.1080/07418825.2018.1524508](https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2018.1524508)