

To the Honorable Senator Winfield, the Honorable Representative Stafstrom, and distinguished members of the Joint Committee on Judiciary:

I am the Rev. Rachel Thomas, an Episcopal Priest in Connecticut. I work with several parishes in Southeastern Connecticut, including those around the York and Corrigan Correctional Institutes. I am writing in support of **Raised Senate Bill 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.**

I am white, and I live in Deep River. Even so, I am not afraid of a strong Clean Slate bill. Rather, I see it as an act of forgiveness and grace to move on, and not be judged by one's past. Surely we all need that forgiveness and grace.

I have heard first hand stories of those who are seeking to rebuild their lives after imprisonment. Even with the help of non-profit organizations, they have trouble finding employment, because of this question: were you ever convicted of a felony? How many of us would want to live with that burden following us all the days of our lives? Especially when we have served our time.

The consequences of having a criminal record, especially a felony conviction, impacts the entire nation because of the way it drains the economy, and how it disproportionately targets communities of color. According to the FBI, 30% of American adults have some sort of criminal record. These records haunt people for the rest of their lives, locking people out of opportunities to meet their basic human needs. Nationally, most employers ([90%](#)), landlords ([80%](#)), and colleges ([60%](#)) use background checks in the recruiting process.

Nationally, [one in three Black men](#) have a felony conviction, compared to just 8% of the total population. Here in Connecticut, 25% - 31% of Black men have a felony conviction. This is driven, in part, by the fact that Black and Latino and Latina people continue to receive harsher and longer sentences for the same crimes as white people.

Focusing on a previous felony keeps the poor, poor, and reduces the opportunity for society as a whole to receive the contributions they are able and willing, to make. It also provides a stronger opportunity for nourishing family life, as children receive the economic benefits of a secure household.

I hope you will move this legislation forward so that others may have a clean slate to be able to start anew.

Thank you

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