

TESTIMONY SUPPORTING Senate Bill 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.

March 10, 2021

Co-Chairs Sen. Winfield & Rep. Stafstrom, Ranking Members Sen. Kissel & Rep. Fishbein, and esteemed Members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Jason Wasserman, I am President of a regional advocacy group called the Restorative Action Alliance, and I am writing to you today to express my provisional support of Senate Bill 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.*

A year ago, I came before this committee to advocate for Clean Slate legislation despite the fact that the legislation would have excluded me. During my testimony, one of the members of this committee quickly looked up my conviction from over a decade before. He commented in public, on the record, the information that came up on his screen. While I was there to advocate for others, I became his target in a way that so many people with prior convictions become vulnerable regardless of their rehabilitation. There was no opportunity for me to correct the record or to advocate for myself as that wasn't the time or the place. I can't stress enough the irony of facing that humiliation while attempting to promote changes to the law that would prevent the very violation to me by a representative in that moment.

By the time that representative pulled his stunt, I had a decade of facing collateral consequences from my arrest and conviction. I have been more fortunate than most in that I never worried about my next meal or where I would sleep at night, but I did face barriers to employment. I recently looked at my salary trend before and after arrest and calculated that the wage hit to me has been \$1.8 million so far. In the last year, I was fired as a client by an investment bank (UBS) where I had some funds for over 20 years and I was denied a term life insurance policy that would have protected my loved ones, all based on having a criminal conviction.



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I've talked with so many people with criminal convictions who cannot find employment despite their desperation to find work. I've met people who have been unable to secure their own housing, years after serving their sentences. These obstacles act as perpetual punishment tools that do nothing to help society. Instead, they are disproportionately aimed at People of Color and keep entire families locked as a permanent underclass.

Next, I will address the carve-outs in the bill, specifically directed at people with sex offenses. As many members of the committee are aware, recidivism rates for people who have committed sex offenses are among the lowest of any crime category with 95+% of people who have committed sex offenses never committing another one. The likelihood of committing a new crime by someone who has remained crime-free significantly reduces and approaches zero as time passes, certainly within the timeframes posed by this bill. The carve-out simply reinforces an emotionally charged, rather than fact-based, response to a difficult topic. I urge the committee to consider expanding the bill to be more inclusive.

Should the carve-outs remain, I ask that the committee add language that the Board of Pardons and Parole cannot use the registry or a past sex crime as the reason for denying a pardon hearing. The Board of Pardons and Parole is currently granting those hearings, but there was a time when they didn't, and it is too easy for a future administration to remove opportunities. When a clean slate is removed as a possibility, people give up hope and that's not good for anyone.

Finally, I will address the pardon process itself and the need for automatic expungement as provided for in this bill. I recently applied for a pardon. Thankfully, I was granted a hearing and the board voted in my favor. However, I can't imagine someone who is facing additional challenges like language barriers or time constraints or even more severe obstacles resulting from their record trying to gather all of the information that is required and writing the responses to the questions. Once someone has paid their debt to society and has remained crime-free for the periods listed in the bill, then they deserve a second chance. Criminal records remain barriers to employment, housing and so much more.

It's time for Connecticut to lead in this area and pass a comprehensive clean slate bill. I'd be happy to provide additional support or answer any questions.



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