

March 8, 2021

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

Good Morning,

I am a long-time, white resident of a suburb of Hartford. I attend church in Hartford, the Catholic Community of St. Patrick-St. Anthony. I am not afraid of this bill and the erasure of criminal records for certain qualified ex-convicts. On the contrary - I believe that without hope and a clean slate - without stability and a job & housing - it becomes almost impossible for these men and women to leave the past behind and continue with a successful, crime-free life. I am more afraid that many will become a burden on society and remain hopeless and unsupported in their quest for meaningful work, housing, and long-term financial independence. My beliefs and my faith influence my words to you. I believe that everyone deserves a second chance, and once a debt is paid, it should not disqualify certain individuals from the freedom to work, find housing, travel, and many other parts of life that most of us take for granted.

I have been inside many prisons in CT, when I worked for the Univ. of CT Health Center as an ergonomist (Occupational Health & Safety). I remember my first impression visiting Cheshire; except for the prison khaki's, it could have been a college campus for all the young men present there, walking between and in the buildings. I was shocked and thought "what a waste of humanity." We know that many deserve to live the rest of their lives with the effects of one mistake. They deserve hope and a fair chance, just as all of us do.

I have also met some ex-convicts through volunteer work at St. Patrick-St. Anthony. Our ministries and worship opportunities lend them a hand - and I have found that these folks want a fair shot at turning around their lives and becoming a regular member of society.

It is apparent through valid research studies that those with a criminal record have extreme difficulty finding employment, housing and stability. For those qualifying under this legislation, they would be returned to society with hope and incentives to remain crime-free in the future and provide for themselves and their families.

The statistics on incarceration in the US are shocking, and the effects of having a criminal record once these men and women are released are clear. More than half of the homeless are ex-convicts. Children are affected by remaining in poverty, and this situation disproportionately affects men and women of color. As reported in the Hartford Courant, since 2016, of 17,226 people who have stayed at homeless shelters, 8,187 had previously spent time in jail or prison. In 2019, the New York Times reported a study done in Michigan, a state that enacted Clean Slate legislation. The Michigan study found that within a year, on average, those with a "clean slate" saw their wages go up by more than 20 percent, after controlling for their employment history and changes in the Michigan economy. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/03/20/opinion/expunge-criminal-records.html>

Thank you,

*Mrs. Patti Wawzyniecki, Vernon, CT*