



DATE: March 10, 2021

TO: Judiciary Committee

FROM: Julia Wilcox, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy, The Alliance

RE: 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.

Good Morning Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Senator Kissel, Representative Fishbein, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Julia Wilcox, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy at the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance (The Alliance). The Alliance is the statewide association of community nonprofits. Community nonprofits provide essential services to over half a million individuals and families in Connecticut every year, and employ 14% of Connecticut's workforce, improving the quality of life in communities across the State.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide 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, Prohibiting Discrimination Based On Erased Criminal History Record Information And Concerning The Recommendations Of The Connecticut Sentencing Commission With Respect To Misdemeanor Sentences.

The Alliance supports the measures that this bill seeks to implement as follows:

1. Require certain training to members of the Board of Pardons and Paroles and to require the board to provide a written explanation when denying a pardon, to streamline record erasure in the case of misdemeanors and certain felonies,
2. Waive certain fees for applicants for a pardon,
3. Allow for appointment of a deputy warden to serve as director of reentry services,
4. Establish a reentry employment advisory committee,
5. Prohibit discrimination against a person based on such person's erased criminal history record information, and
6. Enact the Connecticut Sentencing Commission's recommendations with respect to misdemeanor offenses.

We commend the Committee for introducing this important legislation. The criminal justice system has had an extensive, disproportionate impact on communities of color and people with disabilities. **We respectfully recommend that the committee amend this bill to ensure that disability is listed as a protected class in each one of these statutory sections that would be changed pursuant to the statute.** This recommendation is in keeping with the request of CT Legal Rights Project, Inc.

One in three Americans has some type of criminal record, which can create lifelong barriers to opportunity for them and their families. A criminal record should not be a life sentence to poverty. People who have served their time deserve a fair opportunity for a better future. To better achieve equity, especially across race and income, barriers to employment, education, and housing must be removed.

Following a year of record relief reforms across the United States, on February 16, 2021, the Clean Slate Initiative,

Hartford Office: 75 Charter Oak Avenue, Suite 1-100, Bldg. One, Hartford, CT 06106 | 860.525.5080

Rocky Hill Office: 35 Cold Spring Road, Suite 522 Rocky Hill, CT 06067 | 860.257.7909

a bipartisan national effort to automate the clearing of criminal records, reported that four new state campaigns in Texas, New York, Oregon, and Delaware, had joined ongoing campaigns in Louisiana, North Carolina – and Connecticut, to advocate for automatic record relief legislationⁱ.

A February 2020 Smart Justice Pollⁱⁱ indicated that 85 percent of Connecticut voters, across party lines, support a law prohibiting discrimination related to employment, housing, education, insurance, and credit based on a person's criminal history. In addition, when informed that Connecticut does not have a Clean Slate law, 64 percent of Connecticut voters – again, across party lines, stated that it was important for the legislature to pass a Clean Slate law that is backed by anti-discrimination protections for people with a criminal history.

Project Clean Slate is a City of Detroit Initiative to help residents get their criminal records expunged to gain access to better employment, housing, and educational opportunities. Effective April 11, 2021, new legislation in Michigan will expand the numbers and types of convictions eligible for expungement. Key findings of a recent report include the following:

- For every \$1 spent on Project Clean Slate, there is a potential \$3.70 return in the form of potential annualized wage gains, creating local, state, and federal employment tax revenue.
- When compared to job training, another common public investment in economic growth, the financial returns on expungement programs outpace job training by a factor of 3.8 to 1.
- 81% of Detroiters apply for expungement to remove the stigma associated with having a criminal record.
- 48% of expungement applicants learned about Project Clean Slate through a friend or family member.

Community Justice providers in Connecticut, support justice-involved individuals and their families and help remove barriers to reentry. These programs, funded by the Department of Correction (DOC) and the Court Support Services Division (CSSD) of the Judicial Branch, continue to play an essential role in the ongoing success of the previous Second Chance Society Initiative. Community Justice providers are also funded by the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) to provide ongoing, critical support related to behavioral health and addiction. In addition, these community organizations provide services related to housing and homelessness, funded by the Department of Housing (DOH), assist people experiencing homelessness by providing temporary and long-term housing, and an array of clinical and supportive services. Their staff serve on the front lines of reentry, and provide critical support to individuals, families and communities across Connecticut.

In addition to the proposed legislation, we urge your continued support of reentry services within the community which are essential to the ongoing success of the previous Second Chance Society Initiative. According to the January 2021 OPM Monthly Indicators Reportⁱⁱⁱ, community providers are serving approximately 4,000 people in programs which are funded by Department of Corrections – a greater than 30% increase from 2014. Thousands more receive services through providers that contract with the Court Support Services Division of Judicial Branch.

Thank you for your consideration of these important issues.

Julia Z. Wilcox, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy

JWilcox@ctnonprofitalliance.org

ⁱ Clean Slate Initiative: Four States Launch Clean Slate Campaigns, Building the National Movement for Automatic Record Clearance: <https://cleanslateinitiative.org/media/national-momentum-grows-as-four-states-launch-clean-slate-campaigns/>

ⁱⁱ ACLU Connecticut, Smart Justice Poll, February 2020: <https://www.acluct.org/en/publications/smart-justice-poll-regarding-connecticut-voters-attitudes-toward-clean-slate-proposals>

ⁱⁱⁱ January 2021 OPM Monthly Indicators Report: https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/OPM/CJPPD/CjResearch/MonthlyIndicators/2021-MONTHLY-INDICATOR-REPORTS/MonthlyIndicatorsReport_Jan_-2021.pdf