



TESTIMONY OF AMBER VLANGAS
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, RESTORATIVE ACTION ALLIANCE, INC.
HOUSING COMMITTEE PUBLIC HEARING.

In support of HB 5242, AN ACT CONCERNING THE COLLATERAL
CONSEQUENCES OF A CRIMINAL RECORD ON HOUSING
OPPORTUNITIES

Senator Moore, Representative Luxenberg, Ranking Members Sampson and Scott, and distinguished members of the Housing Committee:

Good Afternoon. My name is Amber Vlangas, and I am one of the co-founders of Restorative Action Alliance, Inc. a regional advocacy group made up of anti-carceral crime survivors, individuals who have been impacted by the criminal legal system, and restorative justice advocates and practitioners.

I am here today to express support for House Bill 5242 – An Act concerning the collateral consequences of a criminal record on housing with a suggested amendment. As a crime survivor, member of a justice-impacted family and an advocate, I have seen first-hand the collateral consequences that individuals who live with a criminal record experience as it relates to housing, regardless of the changes that they have made in their lives. I have worked extensively with individuals who have been discriminated into homelessness due to their records over and over again, struggling to obtain safe and legal housing, even 25 and 30 years after their release. In spite of the surface-level and politically-charged rhetoric, this discrimination has a huge generational impact, particularly on families. In fact, the evidence tells us that 79 percent of formerly incarcerated people have been denied housing due to a past conviction, making them 10 to 13 times more likely to experience homelessness than people who have not been incarcerated. It is also important to understand the ripple effects of this issue. The brunt of the burden for reentry support and housing assistance often falls on families - mothers, fathers, siblings, grandparents, adult children and others simply trying to keep their family safe and together. These families often have to choose between helping their loved ones or maintaining/securing housing, sometimes facing eviction

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or denial simply due to the association. **No one should have to choose between keeping their family together or having a safe place to lay their head.**

HB 5242 is a positive step towards removing barriers faced by people who are trying to rebuild their lives after contact with the criminal legal system, however, I must point out that Connecticut **should not be writing exclusions based on specific offenses or registration requirements into state law.** Understanding that there are federal regulations and policies that are outside of the scope of this proposal to address is one thing, but reaffirming them in our own laws when our state has extensively studied their negative effects is another. The language in lines 126-132 and 175-178 should be changed to read “except as applicable by federal law”. People do not disappear after interacting with the criminal legal system, and all people should have equal opportunity to obtain housing as a human right. Excluding people from the ability to access individualized assessments based on the category of their offense is out of line with the evidence, and counterproductive to public safety goals.

Often, the conversation around discrimination against people who have completed their court-ordered sentences focuses on the flawed idea that providing opportunity to system-impacted individuals is at odds with public safety. I would like to continue to encourage this committee and all decision-makers in our state to expand their notion of what public safety means and who deserves to be safe. Safety should always be seen through the lens of equity, diversity, inclusion and belonging. The disproportionate way that the criminal legal system and mass incarceration affect people of color, gender expansive people, people with disabilities and the poor does not create safety. **Those with limited access to housing due to discrimination based on their criminal record – do not feel safe.** As a collective, we must adopt a clear and fair concept of public safety that includes every person living in our state, focusing on who they are today, and the work they have done to put their life back together, not the worst thing they have ever done, or the worst thing that happened to them.

At Restorative Action Alliance, we believe that all people have value and that a safe society includes the opportunity for every person to be restored, build a productive life, and make contributions for the good of their community. Stable housing is the key to ensuring successful reentry, and our policies must support that **for all people.** We are keeping pure potential locked away when we keep these barriers in place. RAA strongly supports the passage of HB 5242 with amended language.

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Restorative Action Alliance & its partners are passionate about addressing sexual harm while honoring the humanity of every person.

Together, we can imagine & implement real solutions that center accountability, hold people in community & create opportunities for everyone to thrive.

Through education, advocacy & litigation we work to address:

- 1. Intimate and gender-based violence:**
Sexual harassment, sexual abuse, sexual exploitation, rape and assault & other types of intimate harm.
- 2. Ineffective approaches that our criminal legal system utilizes to address sexual harm:**
Public registries, community notification, lengthy & mandatory minimum sentences, overreaching and punitive probation and parole practices, civil commitment and solitary confinement, coercive mental health treatment, proximity and housing restrictions (banishment laws), retroactively applied punishment and restriction to liberty interests.

Why Is Change Needed? The Wrong Solutions To A Serious Problem

Rape, sexual abuse and other interpersonal harms represent a public health crisis.

Unfortunately, our nation's current approach to addressing sexual violence and intimate harm actually undermines our ability to hold people accountable for those offenses and prevent them in the first place. Our adversarial criminal legal system discourages people from taking real responsibility and often ignores the voices of survivors who are looking for real services, healing and hope. The system itself promotes attitudes and environments where sexual violence is perpetrated on a regular basis.

As a society, we divert an enormous amount of resources and attention into systems of continuous punishment for people who have already served their sentence – with no public safety benefit, while cases of sexual abuse and rape routinely go un-investigated or unsolved.

Most people on sex offense registries do not re-offend, and other models of post-incarceration re-entry have been demonstrated to be more effective at keeping people crime-free.

Our current policies force people into homelessness while stripping them of their support systems - creating barriers to employment and stigmatizing people for life.

Marginalized and poor communities are disproportionately affected. State-mandated violence is a human rights issue. Current policy and practice makes the clear choice to weaponize the pain of survivors for the carceral state, while ignoring their needs.

Breaking the Cycle of Harm

RAA supports policies that meaningfully invest our resources into practices such as restorative and transformative justice, survivor services, and primary prevention - things that will actually produce public safety, as opposed to creating a false sense of security. We approach the work through the overlapping lenses of gender, racial and economic justice.

Our aim is to work with policy makers, professionals, educators, and the public to effect change. And, when civil liberties and constitutional rights are infringed upon, our organization will seek to take action through litigation.

IF YOU AGREE THAT WE CANNOT ENGAGE STATE VIOLENCE & DEHUMANIZATION TO BREAK CYCLES OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE, WHILE IGNORING PREVENTION & THE NEEDS OF SURVIVORS - JOIN US TO SUPPORT THIS WORK

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