



TESTIMONY
In support of the goals S.B 403 and S.B 5019
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We are presenting testimony in support of the goals of the Clean Slate proposals **S.B. 403, AN ACT CONCERNING THE BOARD OF PARDONS AND PAROLES, ERASURE OF CRIMINAL RECORDS FOR CERTAIN MISDEMEANOR AND FELONY OFFENSES AND PROHIBITING DISCRIMINATION BASED ON ERASED CRIMINAL HISTORY RECORD INFORMATION AND H.B. 5019 AN AN ACT CONCERNING FAIR FUTURES FOLLOWING ERASURE OF CRIMINAL RECORDS.**

I am Terry Nowakowski, Consultant for the Partnership for Strong Communities (PSC). PSC is a statewide nonprofit policy and advocacy organization dedicated to ending homelessness, expanding affordable housing and building strong communities in Connecticut. We staff and manage the statewide Reaching Home Campaign to end homelessness in Connecticut.

The Reaching Home Campaign has a strong focus on ending homelessness especially for those who are most vulnerable. Individuals in the Criminal Justice system are more likely to be homeless and/or become homeless. Individuals with Criminal Justice involvement are disproportionately poor, people of color and have a medical/behavioral health condition. Racial inequality overall is a major factor in homelessness.

These support of the work of the Reaching Home Criminal Justice Taskforce; comprised of state agencies, community providers, businesses and philanthropy, who met over three years, to review and problem solve over issues related to those who are homeless and involved in the Criminal Justice system. Participants of this Taskforce also participated in the Commission on Equity & Opportunity (CEO) Reentry Workgroup. Stakeholders of both the Taskforce and the CEO Workgroup recommended greater investments in better housing solutions and stronger policies for the reentry population. We recognized that as much as we work to align systems to ensure that those leaving prison are connected to



basic services – that barriers to housing, employment, education and credit make it impossible for any systems work to succeed.

The state will very likely realize a return on that investment and improve the quality of life for its residents through increasing opportunities for those who have been shut out for too long. In addition, the CT workforce will be expanded leading to short and long-term economic gains. Improved reentry practices that include; **erasure of records that no longer hold any community value in terms of public safety; training for Reentry staff on Housing; Risk Assessments; Employment; Education and Community-Based services** will provide greater opportunities for someone to get their life back. Successful integration ultimately allows an individual to demonstrate to the community that rehabilitation and change is possible. When a community embraces those who have changed in this manner, it can lead to increased public safety, reduced recidivism, and reduced healthcare spending.

In addition, these bills support the belief that people who have served time for their offenses and have engaged in rehabilitation should be able to become productive citizens. Housing, employment, education, public accommodations and access to credit and insurance products are all essential to integration back into the community. Having an address and a stable base of operations makes it possible for individuals to make and keep appointments, receive case management services and become accepted members of a community.

In a recent statewide study of 706 individuals who received care from five (5) Community Care Teams the data showed that 55% of those who were literally homeless had Criminal Justice involvement. In addition, clients with Criminal Justice involvement were significantly more likely to have a substance abuse diagnosis (72% vs 45%) compared to those without a criminal record. Housing instability increases risk for serious health problems, exacerbates existing illness, and complicates treatment. Lack of stable housing present serious barriers to improving the health of people with acute or chronic illness.

In addition, returning residents who grew up in poverty often have few options for acquiring safe and stable housing. Family members who live in public housing may be prevented from having their loved one live with them due to parole stipulations, or the policies of local housing authorities. Federal guidelines suggest that housing authorities use specified lookback periods when considering criminal records but adherence to this policy is interpreted widely. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) issued important policy in 2015 “to inform PHAs and owners of other federally-assisted housing that arrest records may not be the basis for denying admission, terminating assistance or evicting tenants, to remind PHAs and owners that HUD does not require their adoption of “One Strike” policies, and to remind them of their obligation to safeguard the



due process rights of applicants and tenants” (Notice PIH 2015-19). We support a state policy that would prohibit places of public accommodation from discriminating against those who have criminal conviction records.

Homelessness is an unacceptable condition for any Connecticut resident, and an expensive public policy problem. We urge you to support the goals of **S.B. 403** and **S.B. 5019** as they **take critical steps to stopping the revolving door for so many leaving our prison system.**

Thank you for hearing my testimony and thank you for your support of efforts to end homelessness in Connecticut. Please contact me at terry@pschousing.org or (860) 244-0066 with any questions.

Sincerely,
Terry Nowakowski
Consultant with the Partnership for Strong Communities