



DATE: March 9, 2020

TO: Judiciary Committee

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

RE: H.B. 5019 An Act Concerning Fair Futures Following Erasure of Criminal Records

S.B. 403 (RAISED) 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

Good Morning, Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Senator Kissel, Representative Rebimbas, 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 in every city and town in Connecticut, serving more than half a million people in need and employing 117,000 people across the State. They are an important part of what makes Connecticut a great place to live and work and an important piece of our economy.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in strong support of two important bills before you today:

- [H.B. 5019](#) An Act Concerning Fair Futures Following Erasure of Criminal Records
- [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

The Fair Futures / Clean Slate Initiative would serve to further enhance Connecticut's status as a leader in the national criminal justice arena. Roughly 70 million adults in the U.S. have a criminal record. Additionally, more than one million youth are charged with crimes and acquire juvenile court records each year. Criminal record clearance enables a person's criminal history information to be removed from easy public access, with the goal of providing these individuals the opportunity to receive a fair second chance to become productive citizens who are engaged in their communities and families, and have the tools necessary to address the multitude of barriers to breaking the cycle of recidivism for themselves and future generations. For individuals who have paid their debt to society and are striving to overcome the mistakes of their past, it is critically important that the actions of the state do not extend their sentence for years – and even decades, beyond.

In response to the current momentum of national bipartisan support, lawmakers in Congress will soon consider a bipartisan proposal that has the potential to assist tens of thousands of Americans to receive a second chance by creating the first- ever, federal process for sealing criminal records. The impact of this initiative would be profound when one considers that one in three Americans across the country have some type of criminal record.

Within Connecticut, there is broad public support for automatic expungement of criminal records. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) of Connecticut recently released [a report](#) which demonstrated that the majority of voters are in

favor of Clean Slate, with 60% of respondents indicating they, “backed such a measure if people remain crime-free for five years.”

Member organizations of The Alliance address ongoing barriers to successful reentry, and the impact in Connecticut, for those who have a criminal record. Community Justice providers support justice-involved individuals and their families. 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 Second Chance Society Initiative. Our members 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, our members who 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. These nonprofit organizations 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 Second Chance Society Initiative. According to the January 2020 OPM Monthly Indicators Report, **community providers are serving approximately 4,000 people in DOC community supervision programs – a greater than 30% increase from 2014**. Thousands more receive services through providers that contract with the Judicial Branch.

**Over the past five years, while the prison population has fallen dramatically, demand for community services for people involved in the justice system has increased, while funding has been cut by nearly 15%, or \$5.8 million. Because of the lack of funding, every day there are hundreds of people sitting in Connecticut’s prisons each day who could be transferred to a residential setting that works to reintegrate them into society at a lower cost, but who cannot be moved due to lack of space in halfway houses.**

Most criminal justice research focuses on the effectiveness of programs that seek to reduce recidivism by changing offender attitudes and behavior. Reductions in recidivism translate to breaking the cycle of crime and poverty. The proposed legislation continues the efforts of the Legislature to build on past success, maintain momentum of the Second Chance Society Initiative, and provide the tools necessary to ensure that these returning citizens are actively engaged and invested in their reentry process, their families and their communities.

We urge the Committee to support H.B. 5242, and S.B. 403. Thank you for your consideration of these important issues.

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