



586 Ella T. Grasso Blvd.
P.O. Box 7093
New Haven, CT 06519
(203) 401-4400
www.columbushouse.org

**Testimony before the Connecticut General Assembly
Housing Committee
Hearing of March 4, 2020**

**Margaret Middleton
CEO
Columbus House, Inc.**

Senator Lopes, Representative McGee, and distinguished members of the Housing Committee, thank you for hearing my testimony today.

My name is **Margaret Middleton and I testify on behalf of Columbus House, Inc.** which helps very low-income people achieve stable housing in New Haven, Middlesex, Hartford, and New London Counties. I also speak to you today as the former Executive Director and Co-Founder of the Connecticut Veterans Legal Center which represents veterans facing eviction and experiencing homelessness.

S.B. No. 355 AN ACT CONCERNING A LANDLORD'S ABILITY TO CONSIDER THE CRIMINAL RECORD OF PROSPECTIVE TENANTS, H.B. No. 6531 AN ACT CONCERNING THE RIGHT TO COUNSEL IN EVICTION PROCEEDINGS, and H.B. No. 6528 AN ACT CONCERNING THE SEALING OF EVICTION RECORDS will Prevent Homelessness

Eviction and criminal records contribute to homelessness. Columbus House has helped over 450 people move into permanent housing since the start of the pandemic using rapid rehousing funds. Our case managers routinely report that past evictions and criminal records prevent otherwise great prospective tenants from renting a safe, affordable and permanent home. The delay in finding housing hurts these clients who are ready to move on with their lives, and it hurts our state and municipalities by increasing the time folks spend in the emergency housing system. As an example, Columbus House supported a single mom in one of our family shelters who was working and had saved up some money. She and her kids were more than ready to move on; they remained in the shelter system because an eviction record makes it almost impossible to find her an apartment.

You have several great bills that will reduce homelessness before you today. Providing representation in housing court, sealing eviction filings and barring the use of old criminal records in leasing would prevent homelessness by helping extremely low-income people stay housed and avoid the shelter system entirely.

Columbus House Supports SB 875 An Act Concerning the Risk of Homelessness for those Released from the Custody of the Department of Correction

In the last twelve months, Columbus House has helped 32 people reentering our communities from incarceration secure housing and restart their lives. Most of those individuals were supported through a partnership with DOC. Our case managers report that the program has been successful; for the most part they have been able to move people directly into an apartment on their first day of release. We know that the mass incarceration of black people in our communities contributes to the over representation of black people in the group we serve at Columbus House. Directing DOC dollars to address some of the consequences of mass incarceration is morally correct and effective at preventing homelessness.

Columbus House Supports S.B. No. 194 AN ACT ESTABLISHING A RIGHT TO HOUSING

Finally, Columbus House supports the creation of a right to housing. Creating this right sends a message that housing is not a privilege for those who can afford it, but a basic human need that we are collectively responsible to provide. Creating this right sends a message that homelessness is not an individual failing, but a collective problem with collective solutions.

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to present this testimony and for your continued support in ending homelessness in our great state.

Sincerely,

Margaret Middleton
CEO
Columbus House, Inc