



Legislative Testimony  
765 Asylum Avenue, 2nd Floor  
Hartford, CT 06105  
860-523-9146  
www.acluct.org

**ACLU-CT Written Testimony Supporting House Bill 6707, An Authorizing Bonds of the State and Appropriating State Funds for Intellectual Disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorder Housing Programs and Reentry Centers**

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

My name is Jess Zaccagnino, and I am the policy counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am writing to testify in support of House Bill 6707, An Authorizing Bonds of the State and Appropriating State Funds for Intellectual Disabilities and Autism Spectrum Disorder Housing Programs and Reentry Centers.

The ACLU-CT believes in a society where all people, including those who have been convicted or accused of a crime, have equal opportunity to contribute to their communities and build successful and fulfilling lives. People who were previously involved in our criminal legal system who have paid their debt to society have earned the ability to live their lives in Connecticut's communities free from discrimination that can impede their progress. Connecticut is stronger and safer when a person who is formerly incarcerated has a fair chance of accessing a job, housing, and education.

Studies have found that the number of people with developmental disabilities and mental illnesses who are incarcerated is likely to be more than in the general population.<sup>1</sup> One study estimates that between 4 and 10 percent of people

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<sup>1</sup> Chiara Eisner, *Prison is Even Worse When You Have a Disability Like Autism*, MARSHALL PROJECT (Nov. 2, 2020), <https://www.themarshallproject.org/2020/11/02/prison-is-even-worse-when-you-have-a-disability-like-autism>.

incarcerated in the United States have an intellectual disability.<sup>2</sup> The Bureau of Justice Statistics estimated that 32 percent of incarcerated people have a disability and approximately 20 percent of incarcerated people have a cognitive disability, which includes developmental disabilities.<sup>3</sup> But these already high rates are likely to be underreported because many people fail to report a disability, either out of stigma or because they simply do not know that they have one.<sup>4</sup> There is little publicly available data on the rates of intellectual disabilities and autism spectrum disorder in Connecticut prisons. Prison is a difficult environment for anyone to navigate, but for autistic people and people with other disabilities, “its loud, unpredictable noises, bright lights, unpleasant odors, complicated social dynamics, and often byzantine bureaucracy”<sup>5</sup> is extra challenging.

Yet, people who are formally incarcerated are nearly ten times more likely to be homeless than any other members of the public.<sup>6</sup> Rates of homelessness are especially high among people with disabilities and people of color with criminal records.<sup>7</sup> Across the country, almost 50,000 people every year enter homeless shelters directly from incarceration.<sup>8</sup> For people reentering their communities after incarceration, being homeless or unstably housed heightens the risk of reoffending.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Leigh Ann Davis, *People with Intellectual Disabilities in the Criminal Justice Systems: Victims & Suspects*, ARC (accessed Feb. 22, 2023), <https://thearc.org/wp-content/uploads/forchapters/Criminal%20Justice%20System.pdf>.

<sup>3</sup> Jennifer Bronson et al., *Disabilities Among Prison and Jail Inmates, 2011-12*, U.S. DEP'T JUST. (Dec. 2015), <https://bjs.ojp.gov/content/pub/pdf/dpi1112.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Jennifer Sarrett, *US Prisons Hold More Than 550,000 People with Intellectual Disabilities—They Face Exploitation, Harsh Treatment*, THE CONVERSATION (May 7, 2021), <https://theconversation.com/us-prisons-hold-more-than-550-000-people-with-intellectual-disabilities-they-face-exploitation-harsh-treatment-158407>.

<sup>5</sup> Einser, *supra* note 1.

<sup>6</sup> Memo to Members, *Formerly Incarcerated People Are Nearly 10 Times More Likely to Be Homeless*, NAT'L LOW INCOME HOUSING COALITION (Aug. 20, 2018), available at <https://nlihc.org/resource/formerly-incarcerated-people-are-nearly-10-times-more-likely-be-homeless>.

<sup>7</sup> Lucius Couloute, *Nowhere to Go: Homelessness Among Formerly Incarcerated People*, PRISON POL'Y INITIATIVE (Aug. 2018), available at <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/housing.html>; *Housing*, ARC (accessed Feb. 22, 2023), <https://thearc.org/policy-advocacy/housing/>.

<sup>8</sup> Mindy Mitchell, *Homelessness and Incarceration Are Intimately Linked. New Federal Funding Is Available to Reduce the Harm of Both*, NAT'L ALLIANCE TO END HOMELESSNESS (Mar. 29, 2018), available at <https://endhomelessness.org/homelessness-incarceration-intimately-linked-new-federal-funding-available-reduce-harm/>.

<sup>9</sup> Patricia McKernan, *Homelessness and Prisoner Re-Entry: Examining Barriers to Housing*, Volunteers of America (last accessed Feb. 28, 2022), available at <https://www.voa.org/homelessness-and-prisoner-reentry>.

The reasons for this appallingly high rate of homelessness among people with criminal records are complex and many, fueled by systematic racism, but discrimination by landlords, inadequate reentry services, and underfunded transition services upon a person's end of sentence are contributing factors. Connecticut needs to invest in housing programs and reentry services specifically for people who are disabled and leaving incarceration. The state also needs to remove barriers that make it impossible for a person to rejoin their family at home at the end of their sentence.<sup>10</sup> The ACLU-CT supports House Bill 6707, and urges this Committee to do the same.

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<sup>10</sup> For example, Regs., Conn. State Agencies §§ 8-68f-12, 17b-812-12(c)(4) (2020).