



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

Written Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 1232, An Act Concerning Housing Discrimination Matters Before the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Ranking Members Kissel and Fishbein, and distinguished members of the Judiciary 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 Senate Bill 1232, An Act Concerning Housing Discrimination Matters Before the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities.

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.

Yet because of systemic barriers to reentry, people who are formally incarcerated are nearly ten times more likely to be homeless than any other members of the public.¹ Rates of homelessness are especially high among people of color and women with criminal records.² Across the country, almost 50,000 people every year enter homeless

¹ 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>.

² 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>.

shelters directly from incarceration.³ For people reentering their communities after incarceration, being homeless or unstably housed heightens the risk of reoffending.⁴ 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 services specifically for people 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.⁵

No person should experience housing discrimination. We support legislation that holds landlords accountable when they engage in housing discrimination. Senate Bill 1232 would increase the penalties for discriminatory housing practices and increase the funding of the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities. The ACLU-CT supports this bill and encourages this Committee to do the same.

³ 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/>.

⁴ 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>.

⁵ For example, Regs., Conn. State Agencies §§ 8-68f-12, 17b-812-12(c)(4) (2020).