



Legislative Testimony
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**Written Testimony Supporting
Senate Bill 326, An Act Requiring the Commissioner of Consumer Protection
to Undertake a Study Regarding Occupational Licensing**

Senator Leone, Senator Witkos, Representative D'Agostino, and distinguished members of the General Law Committee:

My name is Kaley Lentini, and I am legislative counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am submitting this testimony in support of Senate Bill 326, An Act Requiring the Commissioner of Consumer Protection to Undertake a Study Regarding Occupational Licensing.

This bill would require the Commissioner of the Department of Consumer Protection to conduct a study, to be submitted to the legislature's General Law Committee, about occupational licensing that includes, among other things, "what problems, if any, exist with the current system of occupational licensing in this state." Certain restrictions around occupational licenses tend to disproportionately and negatively impact formerly incarcerated people, people with criminal records, and people of color. Therefore, the ACLU-CT encourages the Commissioner of the Department of Consumer Protection to study and provide recommendations regarding the obstacles that people with a criminal record and people of color face when applying for and obtaining occupational licenses in Connecticut.

We urge this occupational licensing study to include an examination of ways in which the occupational licensing boards in Connecticut can be more transparent about the types of criminal convictions that will cause them to reject someone for a particular license. This is a particularly troublesome issue, because Connecticut's prisons have provided training programs for occupations with licensure barriers that prevent formerly incarcerated people from receiving licenses for these jobs. For example, women who are incarcerated at York Correctional Institution in Niantic can receive vocational training in cosmetology and barbering. The facility's program listing even states that women who participate in the training may be able to receive a grant from the Department of Labor to take the licensing examination. However, up until last year, when this legislature passed a law allowing people with criminal records to obtain hairdressing and barbering licenses, the Department of Public Health could deny someone's application

for a license solely because that person was convicted of a felony. Prospective license applicants should have a way to know whether their records will keep them from obtaining a license in a particular occupation, so they can focus their time and energy on preparing for exams they can take and licenses they can obtain.

We encourage the Commissioner to include in the study research and recommendations regarding allowing people with criminal records to apply for and obtain more types of occupational licenses. There is evidence that removing barriers to employment for people with criminal convictions improves the wellbeing and strength of families and communities. As the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has noted, “unemployment is associated with a variety of negative health effects,” while employment can create the “income, benefits, and stability necessary for good health.” While licensure does not guarantee employment, it is an important entry point toward securing a steady income in a number of occupations.

For someone reentering society, a fair chance at a job can break the cycles of poverty and crime by allowing them to support themselves and their loved ones. Studies show that making it easier for people with criminal records to find adequate employment significantly decreases the likelihood that they will return to our criminal justice system. In addition, we know that the majority of people entering the criminal justice system in Connecticut have children. As a result, discriminatory job licensure bans do not just harm formerly incarcerated people—they harm children and families. Particularly in this difficult economic climate, the Connecticut General Assembly should do all that it can to help people with criminal records and their families to succeed. Because people of color are nearly three times more likely to have a criminal record than their white peers, discriminatory licensure practices based on criminal record also disproportionately harm African Americans and Latinos.

The ACLU-CT urges this committee to support this bill and encourages the Commissioner of the Department of Consumer Protection to study, and make recommendations regarding, improving the occupational licensing system in the state for those with criminal histories.