Legislative Testimony

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**Written Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 138: An Act Concerning The Waiver Of Certain Criminal History Records Check Fees For An Indigent Person Seeking A Pardon**

Good day Senator Gaston, Representative Boyd, Ranking Members Senator Cicarella, Representative Howard and distinguished members of the Public Safety and Security Committee:

My name is Gus Marks-Hamilton and I work with the ACLU of Connecticut’s Smart Justice Campaign. I am testifying in support of Senate Bill 138, An Act Concerning the Waiver of Certain Criminal History Records Check Fees For An Indigent Person Seeking A Pardon.

The ACLU of Connecticut believes in a society where all people, including those who have been convicted of a crime, should have an equal opportunity to contribute to society and build successful and fulfilling lives. People involved in the criminal legal system who have completed their sentences have paid their debt to society and earned the right to live their lives without barriers to being happy, productive, and law-abiding residents. People with criminal histories, however, are more likely to encounter background checks that flag a past conviction and have a negative effect on their ability to obtain housing, employment, and attend school. Instead of enabling people living with records, Connecticut law makes life much harder for them. Nine out of 10 employers, 4 out of 5 landlords, and 3 out of 5 colleges and universities use background checks to eliminate candidates with criminal histories.

The ACLU of Connecticut opposes legislation that erect unnecessary barriers for people living with a record, and we support legislation that reduce the hurdles of background checks and helps people apply for and receive a pardon. The pardon process is difficult to navigate, often adversarial, costly, time-consuming, and can be emotionally challening for people who have earned the opportunity to apply for a pardon. SB 138 begins to address one of these barriers for applicants who are indigent by waiving fees associated with the pardon application, such as the $75 State Police Bureau of Identification fee if the applicant pre-enrolls online through the Connecticut Criminal History Reporting System. SB 138 would also prevent independent contractors from charging an additional $30 convenience fee for fingerprinting, which varies among police departments. I have watched many pardon hearings and a frequent answer to the question of why a person is seeking a pardon is to increase their earning potential through a job so they can support their family. Many pardon applicants are working, but in lower-paid jobs where they struggle to support themselves. Even fees that seem modest can be barriers.

For these reasons I strongly urge the members of this committee to support S.B 138. A previous version of this bill from last year was unanimously supported by the members of this Committee last year, so for all these reasons I strongly urge the Committee to again support SB 138 and thank you for listening to my testimony.