



Legislative Testimony
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Sample Testimony Supporting House Bill 5242, An Act Concerning the Collateral Consequences of a Criminal Record on Housing Opportunities

Senator Moore, Representative Felipe, Ranking Members Senator Sampson and Representative Scott, and all the members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Luis Delgado, I am a resident of Middletown and a Smart Justice Leader with the ACLU of Connecticut. I am here to testify in support of House Bill 5242, An Act Concerning the Collateral Consequences Of A Criminal Record On Housing Opportunities. I support this bill because I believe in a society where all people, including those who are living with a criminal history, should have an equal opportunity to contribute to society and build successful and fulfilling lives. Having a place to live is the most critical and fundamental part of that equation, yet Connecticut makes it very difficult for people to actually obtain housing by constructing numerous collateral consequences when a person is living with a criminal conviction.

When I was 18-years-old I tried to join the Air Force. I received excellent scores on the aptitude tests and was recruited by an officer, but I was denied because I was on probation for a marijuana possession. My probation officer then told the recruitment officer that I could not serve this country now or ever because I was a criminal, and that I would be a criminal for the rest of my life. I was already a Puerto Rican and U.S. citizen by conquest and a descendent of colonialism. In hindsight, it seems like the PO knew something about the system that I did not: that my conviction was going to follow me for the rest of my life.

Living a life with a criminal record has been a challenge I don't think anyone can understand unless they've experienced it first-hand. I've learned to avoid jobs with background checks because I knew once the conviction came to light, no matter how good of an employee I was, or how well I got along with my bosses and co-workers, I would probably be let go.

I've learned to steer clear of apartments that required background checks and have been living with friends and family for most of my life. I've never been able to put my own name on a lease because of my background. Most recently I was denied an apartment in Willimantic where the landlord outright told me that they would not give a lease to anyone with a criminal record. The only reason I was able to secure the apartment I currently live in was because of a positive relationship I had with a co-worker at my job who was related to my landlord and could vouch for me. I've always been upfront and honest about my past because to me it shows resiliency and my strengths, but it's frustrating that instead of looking at who I am now, it is a past conviction that defines me. It is not who I am, it is not what I am worth, and it should not be this shadow that I have to live under for the remainder of my life.

Our communities are stronger when everyone has the right to find safe and stable housing without a past criminal conviction and a sentence that has been complete, being a barrier. I urge the members of the Housing Committee to support HB 5242 and thank you for listening to my testimony.