



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 members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Robin Ledbetter, and I am a resident of Hartford and a member of ACLU Smart Justice. I am here to testify in support of House Bill 5242, An Act Concerning the Collateral Consequences of a Criminal Record on Housing Opportunities.

People involved in our criminal legal system who finish their sentences have paid their debt to society. They deserve to live their lives in Connecticut's communities without barriers to being happy, productive, law-abiding residents. Having a record does not affect your ability to be a good neighbor and tenant.

I am formally incarcerated after entering a correctional facility when I was 14-years-old. After reintegrating back into the community after serving 25 years, housing was the biggest obstacle I faced. Although I worked a full-time job since the third week of my release, have consulted and worked for several prestigious schools and organizations, and I was even willing to pay up to 6 month's rent in advance, no landlord was willing to take a chance on me as a tenant. I faced homelessness. Sleeping in my friend's basement and hotels. The facts are that Black women experience the highest rate of sheltered homelessness, almost four times more than white men and two times more than black men.

Desperate, I had a something very few have, someone who had absolute trust in me. My mother. So, I had to ask my 76-year-old mother to take responsibility for 40-year-old me, when I should be independent. She co-signed an apartment so that I could have somewhere to live. In the two years I have lived there, I have never been late on my rent, never had a complaint, and have some great relationships with my neighbors. I am blessed. My building is safe, it is clean, and I love where I live. But now, I'm at a fork in the road and must make an impossible choice. I am now engaged and ready to conquer the next milestone in my life, but my fiancé is formerly incarcerated, and, because of that, we have maintained separate addresses. I have not been able to plan or even think about my wedding because I will have to leave the home I love and have built for myself. In the last four months, I have visited several properties but even with a job, good credit, and a spotless record where I live, not one landlord has been willing to rent to both of us.

My number one priority in my reintegration was to become independent and set an example for the girls coming behind me that change is possible, but I am not independent. Without my mom I would be homeless. I ask the members of the housing committee, have any of you been faced with the choice: leave your home where you feel safe or marry the person you love and face housing insecurity? Because of a poor choice I made 27 years ago, and in my fiancé's case 10 years ago, that's the situation we are in. It's an unnatural choice that Black and Brown people face all the time because Black and Brown people are disproportionately incarcerated, not only in Connecticut, but all over the country.

In Connecticut, residents with a criminal record face over 550 legal barriers to meeting their basic needs, like access to housing, making it more difficult to reintegrate into society and support themselves and their families.¹ *79 percent of*

¹ National Inventory of Collateral Consequences of Conviction, https://niccc.csgjusticecenter.org/database/results/?jurisdiction=260&consequence_category=&narrow_category=&triggering_offense_category=&consequence_type=&duration_category=&page_number=1; see also Kelan Lyons, *Council Begins Study of*

formerly incarcerated people have been denied housing due to a criminal conviction, and they are *10 to 13 times more likely* to experience homelessness than people who have not been incarcerated.²

Stable housing is the base of ensuring successful reentry, yet our state makes it very difficult for people to obtain housing. Housing is a basic human right, and a criminal record does not strip you of your humanity. I ask that the legislature pass An Act Concerning the Collateral Consequences of a Criminal Record on Housing to eliminate barriers to housing for people living with a criminal record and give people an opportunity to have a successful re-entry and become a contributing member of their neighborhoods and community instead of a drain.

Thank you for your time.

Discrimination Against People with Criminal Records, CT MIRROR (Aug. 22, 2019), <https://ctmirror.org/2019/08/22/council-begins-study-of-discrimination-against-people-with-criminal-records/>.

² *Who Pays? The True Cost of Incarceration on Families*, FORWARD TOGETHER & ELLA BAKER CTR. HUM. RTS (Sept. 2015), <https://forwardtogether.org/tools/who-pays/>; Lucius Couloute, *Nowhere to Go: Homelessness Among Formerly Incarcerated People*, PRISON POL'Y INITIATIVE (Aug. 2018), <https://www.prisonpolicy.org/reports/housing.html>; *Five Charts That Explain the Homelessness-Jail Cycle—And How to Break It*, URBAN INST. (Sept. 16, 2020), <https://www.urban.org/features/five-charts-explain-homelessness-jail-cycle-and-how-break-it>.