



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 Tracie Bernardi-Guzman, I am a resident of Waterbury, a wife and step-mother to three children, a ReEntry Case Manager with Community Partners in Actions, 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 hope that after listening to my testimony you will understand that housing discrimination is real for people who are living with a criminal record. In 2015, I was released from prison after serving a 23-year sentence. As a long-term inmate, I never understood recidivism and how people who were released would ever come back. I assumed these people liked prison, or simply could not function on their own, but that was only my opinion because I had not yet directly experienced re-entry.

In 2016, my boyfriend, who is now my husband, and I applied for apartments together in New Britain. He had custody of his three school-aged children and needed to move before the school year began. On the apartment application, it specifically asked, "who would be living in the household has a criminal record?" My boyfriend called the property manager, and she advised him not to add my name to the application because of my record. She said the property owner would not rent to me because of my record and deny us the lease. This was not even a nice apartment;

actually, it was a disaster. The furnace was broken, we had to boil our water, things just kept breaking, and later the landlord tried to evict us using my record as the excuse. We moved to Waterbury into a house my father owned and eventually, after a lot of challenges, were able to purchase it (but that's a whole other story).

In 2021, I helped an elderly incarcerated woman who was wheelchair-bound and had been granted compassionate parole look for housing. Her conviction was over 25 years old, yet she was denied on 13 applications due to her record and while she was unable to find housing she had a stroke, contracted COVID-19 and sadly recently passed away.

Since 2022 I have worked as a Case Manager at the Waterbury ReEntry Welcome Center. Every week – every day – I see people come home and struggle to find a place to live. It's the most critical and fundamental part of reentry, but far too often the most difficult to achieve. A person's past criminal history does not tell a landlord whether a person can pay their rent on time and be a decent neighbor. I have friends now who have an easier time finding a job with their record than they do finding an apartment.

HB 5242 is about giving people a fair opportunity to find an apartment and not be denied simply because of a conviction in their past. People involved in our criminal legal system who finish their sentences have paid their debt to society. They deserve to live their lives in our state's communities without barriers to becoming successful and productive residents like me.

So, I urge the members of the Housing Committee to support HB 5242 and thank you for listening to my testimony.