



Legislative Testimony
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Written Testimony Opposing House Bill 6714, An Act Concerning Cruelty to Animals

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Ranking Members Kissel and Fishbein, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Jess Zaccagnino, and I am the policy counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am writing to testify House Bill 6714, An Act Concerning Cruelty to Animals.

The ACLU-CT is dedicated to ending mass incarceration. The General Assembly must continue to make progress towards reducing the number of people who have contact with the criminal legal system and reducing the financial burdens that we place on people. Mass incarceration over the past four decades has also been driven in large part by increasing the lengths of prison sentences.¹ No person or animal should ever experience sexual abuse, but it is imperative to consider solutions that do not contribute to mass incarceration or rely on blanket bans.

Longer prison sentences have persisted, despite strong evidence that “lengthy prison terms are counterproductive for public safety as they result in incarceration of individuals long past the time that they have ‘aged out’ of the high crime years, thereby diverting resources from more promising crime reduction initiatives.”² Moreover, longer sentences do not appear to have any significant deterrent effect.³

¹ JEREMY TRAVIS, BRUCE WESTERN & STEVE REDBURN, THE GROWTH OF INCARCERATION IN THE UNITED STATES, 70 (2014), available at <https://www.nap.edu/read/18613/chapter/5>.

² Marc Mauer, *Long-Term Sentences: Time to Reconsider the Scale of Punishment*, SENTENCING PROJECT (Nov. 5, 2018), available at <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/long-term-sentences-time-reconsider-scalepunishment/>.

³ *Id.*

Systems that have reduced sentences—notably, the federal criminal system—have not noticed any effect on public safety.⁴

One of the biggest injustices faced by people living with a criminal record are the myriad of collateral consequences flowing from that criminal record, which persist for years, even lifetimes, after a person finishes the punishment they were sentenced to. Collateral consequences turn any sentence into a life sentence. In Connecticut, people living with a criminal record face over 550 legal barriers to full societal participation.⁵ These barriers prevent people from obtaining employment, housing, education, and services. Collateral consequences are not just bad for the people who experience them, they are bad for children, families, and communities as well.

Connecticut is making strides toward eliminating collateral consequences of criminal records, but to achieve this goal, the state cannot continue to impose new collateral consequences. Unfortunately, this is exactly the effect of legislation that erects barriers for people living with criminal records. Rather than institute a blanket ban on animal ownership or employment, the ACLU-CT recommends that the Committee consider a balancing test like the one in Public Act 22-88, which follows an individualized approach and considers evidence of rehabilitation and the amount of time since the conviction. As such, the ACLU-CT opposes House Bill 6417, and urges this Committee to do the same.

⁴ *Id.*

⁵ National Inventory of Collateral Consequences of Conviction, *available at* 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 Discrimination Against People with Criminal Records*, CT MIRROR (Aug. 22, 2019), *available at* <https://ctmirror.org/2019/08/22/council-begins-study-of-discrimination-against-people-with-criminal-records/>.