



Legislative Testimony
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Sample Testimony Supporting House Bill 6948, An Act Concerning the Collateral Consequences of a Criminal Record on Housing Opportunities

Hello Senator Marx, Representative Felipe, Ranking Members Senator Sampson and Representative Scott, and distinguished 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 6948 An Act Concerning the Collateral Consequences of a Criminal Record on Housing Opportunities.

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 tenet. 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-years-old mother to take responsibility for 40-years-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 I 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 formally 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 I 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.

Housing is a basic human right, and a criminal record does not strip you of your humanity. I ask that the members of the Housing Committee support HB 6948 to eliminate barriers to housing for people living with a criminal record.

Thank you for your time.