



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

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

My name is Tracie Bernardi Guzman, I am a resident of Waterbury, a wife and stepmother to three children. I am a Reentry Case Manager at The Waterbury Reentry Welcome Center, an ACLU Smart Justice Leader and a Connecticut Hall of Change Great 8 Inductee.

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 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 23 years in prison, and this past December I was granted a full and absolute pardon. I know, as we all should know, that people change, they grow, they learn, and hopefully they develop into better versions of themselves.

I can remember as a long-term incarcerated person, I never understood recidivism and how people who were released could ever come back to prison. I watched women come in and out of the ever-revolving prison doors. I assumed these women liked prison or simply could not function on their own in society, but that was only my naive opinion because I had no idea what reentry was really like.

I would soon find out. After 23 years of incarceration, I was released in 2015. Shortly after coming home in 2016, my now-husband and I applied for an apartment together in New Britain. He had custody of his then three school-aged children and needed to move before the school year began. On the apartment application it specifically asked if anyone who would be living in the household had a criminal record? He called the property manager and told her I had a felony, so she advised him not to add my name to the application. She said the property owner would not rent to me because of my record. She said just to put his and the kids name on and advised me to just move in. So I did.

After two years the owner tried to evict us because they learned I was living there but not on the lease. We rushed to move before a judge could officially evict us and

were fortunate enough to move to Waterbury into a house my father & stepmother owned. Eventually, after a lot of challenges, we were able to purchase it (but that's the whole story). But if I didn't have family to turn to, we would have been homeless. That's not the case for the majority, most people don't have parents with a spare house.

In 2021 I tried helping an elderly woman who had been granted compassionate parole and needed housing. She was wheelchair-bound and dealing with a lot of medical issues. Her conviction was over 25 years old, yet she was denied 13 applications for housing. Because of this outright discrimination she was forced to remain in the nursing home. She literally died trying to get housing!

As a Case Manager at the Waterbury Reentry Welcome Center. I can tell you firsthand I constantly see people come home from prison and struggle to find a place to live. To this day, we have participants who sleep in garbage dumpsters and elevators because they do not have a place to live.

Housing is the most critical and fundamental part of reentry, but far too often the most difficult to achieve. The more I see it the more I understand why people go back to jail. HB 6948 is about giving people a fair opportunity to find a safe place to live and not be denied simply because of a conviction in their past. They deserve to live their lives in our state's communities without barriers to becoming successful and productive residents like me!

I urge the members of the Housing Committee to support HB 6948 and thank you for listening to my testimony.