



DATE: February 15, 2019

TO: Government Administration and Elections Committee

FROM: Julia Wilcox, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy

RE: SB 25 AN ACT RESTORING ELECTORAL PRIVILEGES TO FELONY CONVICTS WHO ARE ON PAROLE

Good afternoon Senator Flexer, Representative Fox, Senator Sampson, Representative France and distinguished members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

My name is Julia Wilcox, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy at the Connecticut Community Nonprofit Alliance (The Alliance). The Alliance is the statewide advocacy organization representing nonprofits, with a membership of more than 300 community organizations and associations. Nonprofits deliver essential services to more than half a million people each year and employ almost 14% of Connecticut's workforce.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in support of SB 25 AN ACT RESTORING ELECTORAL PRIVILEGES TO FELONY CONVICTS WHO ARE ON PAROLE. Community nonprofits in Connecticut work to reintegrate former offenders into their communities.

It has been common practice in the United States to deem former offenders ineligible to vote, in some cases permanently. Over the last few decades, the overarching trend has been toward reinstating the right to vote at some point.

Research indicates that restoration of voting and other civil rights improves related outcome measures. These initiatives produce tangible benefits for both the individuals and the communities of Connecticut, reducing disenfranchisement and increasing civic engagement, thereby reducing recidivism.

A 2011 study by the Florida Parole Commission¹ found that former offenders whose civil rights had been restored were much less likely to return to prison than others in the released prisoner population. The report found that 30,672 offenders had their civil rights restored in calendar years 2009 and 2010 combined. Of those, only 3,406 had committed offenses by May 31, 2011 that resulted in a return to prison or community supervision by the Florida Department of Corrections. This equates to an 11.1% recidivism rate for ex-felons whose rights were restored, which contrasts with a 2010 FDOC report that found 33.1% of all state prisoners released from 2001 to 2008 reoffended within three years.

In addition, if prisoners remain citizens and retain their civic status throughout their sentences, then it follows that prisoners should be entitled to the most basic of their civil rights - the right to cast a ballot. Disenfranchising this population creates a class of people still subject to state and federal laws, but without a voice in the way they are governed. The proposed legislation provides the opportunity to reinforce the powerful impact of each returning citizen becoming actively engaged and accountable for their future, the future of their families and their communities.

The citizens of Connecticut are fortunate in that our state has long been considered a national model at the forefront of overarching criminal justice reform, including adopting best practices and real results as reflected in

national studies. Most criminal justice research focuses on the effectiveness of programs that seek to reduce recidivism by changing offender attitudes and behavior. Reductions in recidivism translate to breaking the cycle of crime and poverty.

The proposed legislation continues the efforts of the Legislature to build upon past success, maintain momentum of the Second Chance Society Initiative, and provide the tools necessary to ensure that these returning citizens are actively engaged and invested in their reentry process, their families and their communities.

As of December 2018, there were 3,935 citizens of our state who were receiving community supervision from nonprofit providers who contract with the DOC. This represents an 18% increase since December 2015, while the prison population was simultaneously reduced by 16%. Thousands more receive services through providers who contract with CSSD and the Judicial Branch.

Thank you again for your consideration and the opportunity to testify in support of SB25.

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¹ <https://www.fcor.state.fl.us/docs/reports/2009-2010ClemencyReport.pdf>