



2023 REENTRY PRIORITIES

PREPARED BY

The Connecticut Reentry Collaborative Policy Working Group

INTRODUCTION

The Connecticut Reentry Collaborative Policy Working Group is made up of service providers and advocates from the ten reentry roundtables working together to support and advocate for reentry policy in Connecticut. The goals of the Policy Work Group are to consolidate and coordinate the efforts of various organizations and stakeholders working on behalf of returning citizens in order to maximize our impact and achieve legislative improvements for the reentry community statewide.

We spent the fall of 2022 hearing from advocates about their efforts and bills, as well as hearing from one other about the most pressing issues in our own work. This report is the result of those discussions. In it we have outlined our legislative and policy priorities for 2023 and onward. We look forward to working with our partners in our communities, the Department of Corrections, the governor's office, and the Capitol to push for bold and lasting changes in the Connecticut criminal justice landscape so that men and women returning from prison have as much opportunity and access as any other Connecticut resident.

2023 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

Policies that have corresponding legislation in the pipeline.

- 1. Anti-Discrimination in Housing**
- 2. State ID Accessibility**
- 3. End Routine Strip Searching**
- 4. Protect Gains from Clean Slate**
- 5. Demand Accountability for the PROTECT Act**
- 6. Fund Community Health Worker Services**
- 7. Raise the Age of Arrest**
- 8. Stop the Use of Chemical Agents on Youth in Confinement**

LONG TERM POLICY GOALS

Policies that have not yet been proposed in legislation.

- 1. Anti-Discrimination in Employment**
- 2. Healthcare Continuity**
- 3. Justice Reinvestment**

2023 LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES

HOUSING

Anti-Discrimination in Housing

Across the state, landlords continue to reject potential tenants based on their criminal records, even years after they have left prison. This practice contributes to housing insecurity for returning citizens. Formerly incarcerated individuals are almost 10 times more likely to be homeless than the general public, and this risk of homelessness is at its highest post-release.

An Act Concerning the Collateral Consequences of a Criminal Record on Housing seeks to change this and make housing practices more inclusive and fair. This bill will prevent blanket denials of applicants with criminal records and requires landlords to conduct an individualized assessment of each applicant. Under this proposal, landlords cannot consider misdemeanors one year after conviction or felonies three years after conviction in their assessments. If sufficient time has not passed, landlords must consider other factors such as the nature of the crime, its relationship to the prospective tenancy of the convicted person, and evidence of rehabilitation, good behavior, or employment.

Our communities are stronger when all of our members are supported and given a chance to succeed, and this bill is a first step to implementing equitable housing practices.



IDENTIFICATION

Greater Access to State Identification

State identification accessibility is critical to successful community reentry. In order to address returning citizens' needs, including housing, medicine, employment, and state benefits, these individuals need a primary identification document to verify their identity. Examples of primary identification include a state ID, a birth certificate, and a social security card.

Currently, the Connecticut Department of Corrections' stated policy is that it attaches IDs to each returning citizen's discharge plan. Despite these efforts, service providers in Connecticut continue to see countless recently released individuals without any form of identification. State identification can get expired, lost, or damaged while incarcerated, and in some cases, individuals may enter prison without a form of identification. Upon release, individuals are left to navigate the long and costly process of obtaining state identification on their own. These obstacles only delay returning citizens from getting back on their feet.

That is why we support House [Bill 5333](#), An Act Concerning Photo Identification upon Reentry into the Community. This bill calls on DOC and the Department of Motor Vehicles to ensure returning citizens have a state ID in hand upon release. All communities benefit when their members have the necessary tools to access basic needs and services.

Please contact James Bhandary-Alexander at james.bhandary-alexander@yale.edu for further information.

STRIP SEARCHES IN DOC

End Routine Strip Searching

Strip searching is frequently conducted by correctional officers throughout an individual's time in prison. During these searches, individuals are touched without their consent and forced to remove their clothes and expose private areas of their bodies. This act is a form of sexual violence and results in the humiliation, degradation, and dehumanization of people who are incarcerated. This experience can cause health-related issues such as post-traumatic stress disorder, depression, and anxiety in survivors and it also re-traumatizes those with past experiences of abuse or sexual assault. This practice is ongoing in thirteen prisons, jails, and criminal justice facilities in CT.



That is why we support the passage of **An Act Concerning the Use of Strip Searches by the Department of Correction**. This bill would mandate that DOC abide by the Mandela rules and only perform a strip search of an incarcerated person if “absolutely necessary” and “upon establishment of probable cause.” DOC would be encouraged to use less invasive search mechanisms, including metal detectors. In extreme cases where a strip search is deemed necessary, officers must follow strict guidelines and keep detailed records of these searches for transparency.

It is the responsibility of DOC to respect the bodily integrity and human dignity of incarcerated individuals, and ending routine strip searching is a major step towards this goal.

Please contact Barbara Fair at barbfair848@gmail.com for further information.

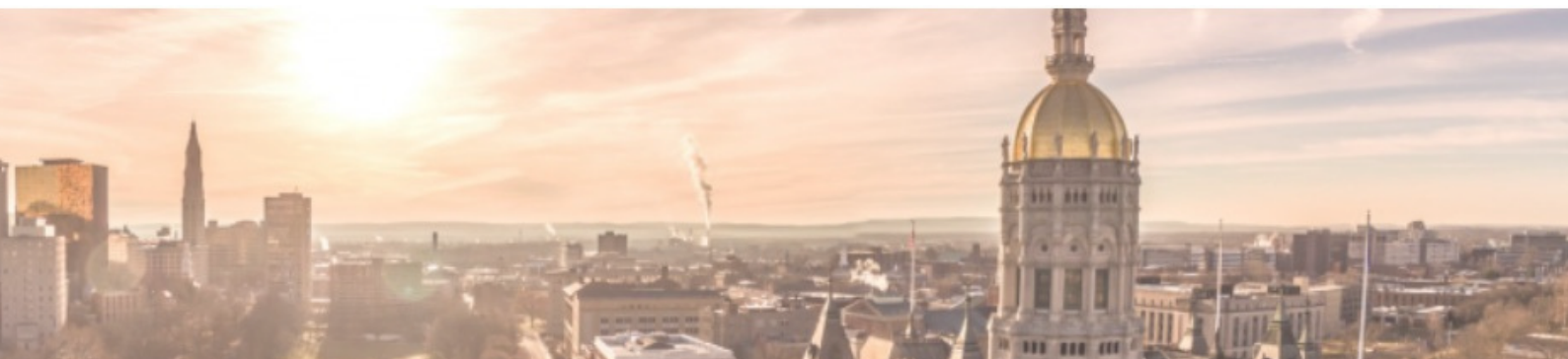
CLEAN SLATE

Protect Gains from Clean Slate

Signed into law in 2021, The Clean Slate Act was a huge accomplishment for the reentry community and the state of Connecticut. The Clean Slate Act provides for the automatic erasure of criminal records seven years after the date of conviction for a misdemeanor and 10 years after the date of conviction for certain felonies. Implementation of the bill was slated for Jan 1., 2023, but the Lamont administration delayed it to the second half of 2023. This excessive delay is keeping individuals across the state in limbo.

Criminal record erasure is crucial to the lives of returning citizens as the stigma of incarceration follows them for years after release. This stigma reduces their employment opportunities by as much as a third, and hourly wages by 10–20 percent. A criminal record also limits their housing opportunities and their ability to access higher education. Once implemented, the Clean Slate Act will provide 250,000 individuals in Connecticut with a second chance at life and better economic opportunities.

We will spend our timethis legislative session pushing for **quick and efficient implementation** of the bill and combatting attempts from the opposition to exclude more individuals from automatic erasure.



PROTECT ACT

Demand Accountability for the PROTECT Act

In 2022, as a result of tireless activism from Stop Solitary CT and the reentry community, Governor Ned Lamont signed SB 459, known as the Protect Act, into law. The Protect Act limits the number of days a person can spend in isolated confinement to no more than 15 consecutive days or 30 total days within any 60-day period and mandates minimum wellness standards in isolation. This bill also created an independent ombuds position within the Connecticut Office of Governmental Accountability to ensure that the Department of Correction followed these guidelines and provided transparency on prison conditions.

A year after the bill's passage, it is **clear that DOC has not implemented these measures uniformly throughout all of their prisons**. Many incarcerated individuals in CT have reported extensive stays in solitary confinement and a failure to meet minimum wellness standards. That is why we support the efforts of Stop Solitary CT to appeal to the Department of Justice to investigate DOC for implementation of the Protect Act. Prolonged solitary confinement is torture, and holding DOC accountable for not abiding by the Protect Act is vital to safeguarding the human rights of individuals in our criminal justice system.

Please contact Barbara Fair at barbfair848@gmail.com for further information.

HEALTH SERVICES

Fund Community Health Worker Services

Quality medical care for recently released individuals is vital to successful community reentry. Returning citizens experience a higher risk of death and a higher prevalence of behavioral health disorders and chronic and infectious diseases in comparison to the general population. To combat this, we must have **effective health interventions** with these individuals immediately upon release.

Community Health Workers with their own personal experience with incarceration can help facilitate these health interventions. CHWs can foster trust between the patient and medical staff and can connect patients with health and social services through outreach, educational, and advocacy efforts. These services are vital when “distrust, discrimination, poor communication, and racism in the health system” can hinder returning citizens’ quality of care. CHW services are life-saving and are needed throughout the state of CT.

That is why we support **public funding of CHW services for returning citizens**. Ensuring that each person leaving incarceration is provided with a CHW would only cost the state \$5 million per year and would save the state about 2 ½ times that amount in state Medicaid costs. CHWs are integral to bridging the healthcare gap in justice-impacted communities, and it is in the interest of all CT residents to improve public health.

Please contact James Bhandary-Alexander at james.bhandary-alexander@yale.edu for further information.



RAISE THE AGE

Raise the Age of Arrest to 14

Connecticut children as young as 10 can be and are arrested and sent to court. In 2020, Over 4% of all minors arrested in Connecticut were children under 13 years old. Subjecting very young children to police and courts causes unnecessary trauma and makes them more, rather than less likely to become court involved in the future. Police disproportionately target Black and Brown children, furthering the systemic racial inequity and injustice that exists in our state. In 2019, 57% of the children under 12 arrested in Connecticut were children of color, mostly from urban areas.

The most vulnerable members of society should not be subjected to the harms of our criminal justice system. That is why we support efforts to raise the age of arrest in CT to 14. In addition, we are in favor of measures that provide the appropriate educational, mental health, and family support for children.

Please contact the Connecticut Justice Alliance at iliana@ctja.org for further information.

CHEMICALS ON YOUTH

Stop the Use of Chemical Agents on Youth in Confinement

Chemical agents are compounds that irritate the mucous membranes in the eyes, nose, mouth, and lungs. Pepper spray is a chemical agent employed by the Department of Corrections as a tool to "manage" individuals in prison. Chemical agents have been linked with intense pain, swelling, and blistering of the skin, wheezing and an inability to breathe or speak, and acute hypertension, which may lead to an increased risk of stroke or heart attack.

DOC has utilized pepper spray on youth at Manson Youth Institute without regard to the impact these chemicals will have on their physical and mental health. Between Jan. 1, 2018, and Sept. 30, 2022, officers at Manson employed chemical agents on the population 164 times, and 159 of those times were during physical altercations with youth. Use of force practices such as pepper spray can exacerbate children's anger and trauma and can constitute cruel and unusual punishment.

That is why we support a prohibition on the use of chemical agents on children who are incarcerated. DOC should implement alternatives to use of force practices, focusing on the mental health and engagement of incarcerated youth. Staff should receive regular training on deescalation of confrontations, crisis intervention, and adolescent development among other trauma-informed approaches to care, and they should be supported in their efforts by mental health professionals.

Please contact the Connecticut Justice Alliance at iliana@ctja.org for further information.

LONG TERM POLICY GOALS

EMPLOYMENT

Anti-Discrimination in Employment

According to ACLU-CT, formerly incarcerated individuals face over 550 barriers to full civic participation upon release, and the vast majority of these barriers are related to employment. Employers engage in hiring practices that discriminate against individuals with criminal records, and the state protects these practices. Criminal background checks are widely used by companies and give them the ability to deny individuals employment due to stereotypes and assumptions based on their record.

Formerly incarcerated individuals who are Black or Hispanic experience “an intensification of stigma” as their criminal record reinforces racial stereotypes, reducing their chances of securing employment even more. Every person deserves the opportunity to have a job and to support themselves and their families. When companies give returning citizens a fair chance and evaluate them based on their skills and qualifications, we all benefit.

That’s why we support anti-discrimination legislation that would expand the public sector protections for people with a criminal record to the private sector and modify the existing individualized assessment process for potential employees.

We hope to work with folks in the reentry community to introduce legislation that mandates employers conduct an assessment of the applicant and take into consideration if their record closely relates to their job, time passed since the conviction, and evidence of rehabilitation.

HEALTHCARE

Healthcare Continuity

For many recently released individuals, discontinuity of healthcare is the norm. As many as 90 percent of returning citizens are without health insurance upon release, hindering their ability to access medication and develop a relationship with a primary physician. Recently released individuals are particularly in need of consistent medical care as they have a high burden of chronic physical health conditions, infectious diseases, disability, mental illness, and substance use.

In order to properly address these medical needs post-release, the Department of Correction needs to coordinate continuity of care with community health care providers. In Connecticut, this coordination is often inconsistent and leaves recently released individuals to navigate their health needs on their own. We hope to work with DOC to ensure that there is pre-release planning for the incarcerated population during and after release. Pre-release planning will guarantee that recently released individuals can have continued access to medical coverage and to a healthcare worker.



JUSTICE REINVESTMENT

Increased Funding For Reentry Statewide

The Connecticut incarcerated population has decreased significantly in the past 25 years. This past year, Connecticut has seen a rapid reduction in the carceral population in large part due to the closing of certain facilities. This decarceration means significant savings for the state. These savings should be **reinvested into community programs** that would create opportunities and improve communities to which people are returning. We must also work to ensure that the trend of decarceration continues.

One such area in need of funding in our communities are Reentry Welcome Centers similar to those in Hartford and New Haven. These centers serve as one-stop locations for men and women released from the Department of Corrections, and those who have been in the community for some time. They offer comprehensive services such as housing, healthcare, and employment support. Additionally, programs like Hang Time and Her Time, and Prevention and Diversionary programming help ensure a more seamless reentry into society. There is currently a lack of consistent government funding for both the continuation and creation of such programs. Inclusion of funding for these programs in the state budget means that returning citizens are more supported and more likely to positively contribute to the community.