

Dear Members of the CT Sentencing Commission:

My name is Stefan Keller and I am submitting this testimony on behalf of Hartford Deportation Defense. We, Hartford Deportation Defense, write to express our support for An Act Concerning Connecticut Misdemeanor Sentences. This proposal would reduce the maximum length of all misdemeanor convictions in Connecticut from 365 days to 364 days.

While this seems like a small, technical change, it can make a huge difference in the lives of immigrants in our state. Hartford Deportation Defense is a community group made up of immigrants and non-immigrants alike including mothers, neighbors, youth, and community members from Hartford and the surrounding area. We see day to day how deportations are tearing apart families and communities and many of our members have been personally affected by the criminal justice and deportation systems. Some of our members have spent months in detention centers waiting anxiously for their date in court or have been the family members on the outside, separated from their loved ones and trying desperately to fight for their ability to stay and to hold together a family with a significant piece missing.

When many of us hear deportations we think only undocumented immigrants, but thousands of legal permanent residents are deported every year, most for being charged with minor, non-violent, misdemeanor offenses. This is actually happening to one of our members right now; Wayzaro. Wayzaro came to Hartford when she was 3 years old. Hartford is her home. All her life she attended public schools in the area and has been an important member of the community. Wayzaro currently lives here with her wife Tamika and 15-year-old daughter Azaiyah.

In 2011 ICE agents arrested Wayzaro during community service at Hartford Community Court on Washington Street. If her suspended sentence for a misdemeanor in 2005 had been one day shorter, 364 days instead of 365, none of what followed would have happened, including her receiving an ankle monitor, confiscation of her permanent residency, house visits from ICE, and now an order to get a one-way plane ticket to London for December 14th. She had to endure all of this because of a one day difference in her sentence, and how that was seen at the federal level.

I think all of us here would agree that in this case the punishment does not fit the crime. If Wayzaro was a citizen she would have done her community service like hundreds do every month in Hartford and been on her way. She has complied with authorities every step of the way. But because she was a permanent resident and not a citizen she has had to face this harsh and grossly unequal punishment, and now must deal with the prospect of being torn away from her wife and daughter.

While many of this was made possible due to federal "tough on crime laws" that triggered mandatory deportation for many minor or misdemeanor offenses without any discretion from judges, Connecticut can do something about this. Connecticut can reduce the sentence for offences carrying a maximum of 365 days to 364.

It is widely believed across the country, and especially in the State of Connecticut, that many of these "tough on crime" policies did nothing to make our communities safer and just served to target our black and brown community members. We as a state have the power to break this segment of the

prison-to-deportation pipeline and ensure that unjust federal policies do not disproportionately impact our immigrant community members and neighbors.

Misdemeanor sentencing reform would continue to stem the cycle of mass incarceration that more greatly impacts communities of color, allow immigrants charged with minor offenses to be confident that they will be able to continue to build lives with their families and communities, and give Connecticut judges more discretion to consider the circumstances of each case. Having a misdemeanor offense suddenly end up with someone being permanently separated from their family and community certainly does not sound like a second chance to us.

We urge you to support An Act Concerning Connecticut Misdemeanor Sentences to protect the rights and lives of our community members.

Sincerely,

Hartford Deportation Defense