



January 5, 2022

Joint Committee on the Judiciary, 24 Beacon Street, State House Room 136, Boston, MA 02133

Submitted by email

Re: Support for second chance bills: H1568, H1904, H1908, H1037

Dear Joint Committee on Judiciary,

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony in strong support of *the Second Chance Bills H1586, H1904, H1908 and H1037*. These bills would help advance the Commonwealth's goals of promoting health equity and moving towards more equitable decision making for housing and employment for people who have been involved in the criminal legal system and served their time.

The Public Health Institute of Western MA provides skills, expertise, and experience to create successful public health campaigns and sustainable system changes to improve health and well-being in Western MA. We build on community assets and build community capacity to positively impact social determinants of health by engaging and partnering collaboratively with communities and leading data to action strategies to champion and advocate for a public policy agenda.

In 2019, the Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts' Age Friendly City housing assessment found that older Black men in Springfield who had a criminal record had a shared experience of not being able to secure affordable housing because of CORI (Criminal Offender Record Information) checks. These findings mirrored those of a 2018 City of Springfield housing study, prompting our further examination. The Public Health Institute of Western Massachusetts explored how potential changes to housing providers' policies and practices regarding criminal background checks might impact the health of members of our target population—older people with a CORI. This health impact assessment on [*Healthy Aging with a Criminal Record in Hampden County MA: A health impact assessment about the use of Criminal Offender Registration Information \(CORIs\) in housing decisions*](#) was conducted in collaboration with an Advisory Committee made up of housing providers, organizations that represent community members with a criminal record who have been denied housing, legal advocates, law enforcement led-reentry organizations, and systems change advocates.

We researched how six policies, listed below, impact three social determinants of health: accessing affordable housing, keeping people from further involvement with the criminal legal system, and safety. The policies under consideration were to: 1. Establish formal partnerships between housing providers and others including reentry organizations; behavioral health providers; and organizations that provide services to people experiencing homelessness and housing instability. 2. Use only CORIs that fall under exclusions mandated by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in housing admissions decisions once eligibility is determined. 3. Allow applicants to submit evidence of mitigating circumstances during the initial application period without any requirement to disclose past convictions. 4. Create explicit screening criteria for denial that is available publicly. 5. Share population-level data about number of people denied housing, along with reasons for denials (including criminal background check), number of people requesting hearings, and the results of those hearings. 6. Permit current



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residents to house family members with a CORI as an authorized occupant, except those that fall under the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development mandated exclusions.

Our recommendations are in line with these Second Chance Bills. We have videos of people sharing their real life experiences of losing jobs, being unable to secure housing and the toll that it takes on their health and wellness. We hope you will review our report and [infographic](#) and watch the videos as you debate these bills. The implications of passing these policies could be life changing for many.

We respectfully ask you to support these second chance bills: H1568, H1904, H1908, H1037 and favorably report from your committee. Please do not hesitate to contact me at jcollins@publichealthwm.org. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jessica Collins
Executive Director
Public Health Institute of Western MA