



EDUCATION JUSTICE PROJECT
an initiative of Education at Illinois

SB2158: Registries/Banishment

SUBJECT MATTER HEARING
SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON CRIMINAL LAW AND PUBLIC SAFETY
APRIL 26, 2023

Testimony of Rebecca Ginsburg EJP Director, UIUC

My name is Rebecca Ginsburg and I'm a tenured faculty member at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign, where I direct the Education Justice Project (EJP), Illinois' college-in-prison program. Through EJP, incarcerated students at Danville Correctional Center earn U of I credits and certificates. They serve as mentors and peer instructors to others at the prison. After release, many continue their educations and earn Bachelor's and Masters degrees at University of Illinois campuses and other institutions.

We're immensely proud of our released students and their accomplishments. Over 350 individuals who have been through EJP since 2008 have become small business owners, truck drivers, carpenters, adult education teachers, non-profit leaders, and writers, among other professions. After release, they also become engaged with their families as fathers, grandfathers, uncles, and sons. They join religious

congregations and assume positions of authority and trust within their communities.

Remarkably, they accomplish all this in spite of the numerous obstacles they face upon reentry.

I am writing in support of SB 2158 because registries and banishment zones are among the most pernicious of obstacles.

Our released students report that Illinois' registry and banishment laws greatly limit their housing choices, impact their ability to connect with family, and compromise their personal safety. In their words (all individuals cited below have chosen to remain anonymous):

Please consider that people who are coming home from prison are already struggling with the trauma of incarceration, struggling to reconnect with their

Education Justice Project
College of Education
University of Illinois
1001 S. Wright St.
Champaign, IL 61820
educationjustice.net



APRIL 2023

families, and trying to deal with over 40,000 forms of felony-based legal discrimination. Enforcing policies that further restrict access to basic needs such as housing and employment only make this process more difficult and increase chances of reincarceration. The simple truth is there is no real data to support the claim that registries make anyone safer. Likewise, at the end of the day, restricting legal pathways to basic necessities does not eliminate people's need of them. It only forces them to try to meet these needs in other ways. These policies are wholly harmful, undermine the very public safety they purport to protect, and exacerbate disparities in the legal system.

Another explains:

Housing insecurities are about more than simply not having a place to live. It is about not having access to the housing of your choice. Formerly incarcerated individuals are not a part of federally protected classes against housing discrimination and have little to no state protections. Not being able to have access to the housing of your choice is a permanent punishment for people living with the stigma of having a criminal history. It can also create a personal safety threat as many formerly incarcerated individuals are forced to move back to the neighborhoods of their committing offenses leaving them open to retribution and reprisal. Not having the opportunity to move away can become a matter of life and death.

And, another:

The need to do a background check when searching for a residence is scary. In most cases the feeling of not being able to qualify just because you have a felony conviction has the ability to be demoralizing. Many renters take the approach of not taking a chance on anyone who has a felony conviction. This makes it extremely difficult to find somewhere to live.

SB2158 will improve conditions for these college-educated individuals who have worked hard to remove themselves from their pasts and deserve our support. By opening up more areas of our cities for housing and allowing individuals to “grandfather” a particular address, this bill provides a chance for thousands of tenuously housed individuals to secure permanent living situations.

Stable families and stable communities require stable individuals who know they can be around, maintain a job, and support their families.

SB2158 is pro-family, pro-community health, and pro-economic development. It is also pro-education, as housing insecurity makes it difficult for individuals to enroll and succeed at college or graduate school.

Thank you for your serious consideration. I urge you to support SB2158.