



Testimony of the American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky

To Members of the Senate Standing Committee on Education

Regarding House Bill 368

March 18, 2020

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Chairman Wise and members of the Committee:

My name is Amanda Hall and I am a Smart Justice Field Organizer at the ACLU of Kentucky. Unfortunately, I am not able to attend the ninth meeting of the Senate Standing Committee on Education in person due to limited Capitol access and public health recommendations to avoid large gatherings, as a result of COVID-19. I still wanted to share my testimony regarding House Bill 368, and hope you will accept this letter as my testimony.

First, I would like to thank Representative Tipton for bringing this important bill forward. I had the privilege to attend a meeting with Representative Tipton and some of his constituents. One of them was a woman named Tiffany Green who is in long term recovery. She has been incarcerated and spoke honestly with Representative Tipton about the long-term impacts her felony conviction has had on her life. She has secured fulltime employment, has her kids back in her life, and has dreams of going back to college. She allowed me to share these personal details because she believes so deeply in House Bill 368. I'm sure every member of this committee has constituents just like Tiffany, who this bill would help.

Like Tiffany, I also have a felony on my record. I have been in long term recovery for more than 7 years. My past convictions have created significant secondary barriers to rebuilding my life after incarceration: barriers to voting; barriers to safe housing; barriers to education; and barriers to employment.

I remember when I decided I wanted to go back to college to pursue a social work degree. I was filled with doubt, but I remembered how much I loved school as a little girl growing up in Eastern Kentucky. I had big dreams then. I was the valedictorian of my middle school. I wanted to be the first person in my family to graduate from college.



Addiction and incarceration stole that dream. But only for a few years. After incarceration and through recovery, I knew I had to go back to school. I had to chase that dream again.

When I decided to go back to school, I was living in a homeless shelter, dependent on public transportation, and working three part time jobs. I knew my background would scare employers away and might even push college out of reach. Moreover, getting accepted into college was an expensive process full of its own obstacles. It almost made me give up on that dream for the same reasons a college education is out of reach for so many other Kentuckians.

House Bill 368 will give more people the opportunity to seek higher education. Kentucky has the second-highest rate of women's incarceration, and is second in the nation for children who have had or currently have an incarcerated parent. This bill will strengthen Kentucky families by reducing recidivism through education.

In May, I will graduate with my Master's degree. My family and friends will give their well wishes, and I'm sure my children and step children will be proud. I hope to use my graduation to inspire my children and others. I strongly urge this committee to vote yes on House Bill 368. Please give more Kentuckians the chance that I have been given. Redemption is real, and second chances make our Commonwealth stronger.

Thank you for consideration. I hope all staff and members of the General Assembly stay healthy during this time.

Sincerely,

Amanda Hall