

September 23, 2019

Dear Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with my written testimony regarding Senate Bill 160, sponsored by State Representative Sean J. O'Brien and Michael J. Rulli.

When I was twenty years old I fell in with the wrong crowd and made some really bad decisions that have impacted my entire life. One summer night I was out with some people, that I had no business being with, and they thought it would be "so cool" to head over to the local grocery store, wait for the night manager to leave the building and to scare him so they could steal the store's nightly bank deposit.

August 8, 2003, I remember the night vividly. The individuals that I was with asked me to drive them over to the store. They told me that they were going to "jump" the manager when he came out of the store, scare him a little and steal the money. I didn't believe them. I didn't think they would do it, so I agreed and I drove them to the back parking lot of the grocery store. They exited my vehicle and I left. I went home, started a load of laundry and didn't give their "plan" another thought. A few hours later the police came to my home and arrested me. They had robbed the night manager, broke out the window in his vehicle and fled the scene. I was in a state of complete disbelief.

Regardless, I was taken to the police department and questioned. I was the getaway driver that got away before the crime even happened. I was honest with the police and told them everything that I knew. The police informed me that although I was not present during the actual crime, my knowledge and lack of notifying the police made me just as guilty as the individuals who committed the crime.

While I was in the county jail, another individual informed the police that I was the one committing other crimes in the area. Absent any evidence, I was charged with additional felonies, which were ultimately dismissed through a No Bill.

During the pendency of my case in the Trumbull County Court of Common Pleas, my public defender informed me that my co-defendants intended to plead guilty to their charges. I had no choice but to plead guilty to a lesser crime, a second-degree felony of Complicity to Commit Robbery. I was told that my conviction would be considered "non-violent". With no

criminal history and no prior record, I was sentenced to two years in prison. My co-defendants each received three years in prison.

While incarcerated, I received my G.E.D, worked in the mailroom, obtained a gate pass and was responsible for raising and lowering the American Flag daily. I stayed out of trouble, received no citations or tickets. My lawyer filed for Judicial Release, which was denied. Even as a first time offender, I served every day of my two-year sentence.

Upon my release from prison on August 8, 2005, I was placed on two-years of parole. I got a job and worked sixty to seventy hours per week while living with my parents. Within six months, my parole officer changed my status to non-reporting, as he said he had more important things to worry about. I paid all my supervision fees on time each month and six months later I was released from parole. August 8, 2006, I was completely done. This was my past now, or so I thought.

October 25, 2006, my daughter was born. September 15, 2007, I was married. April 12, 2011, I was divorced. My divorce attorney asked me why I wasn't able to find a job, so I explained my story, just as I have here. She told me that one bad decision, one mistake, does not define who you are as a person. She took a chance on me and gave me a job. Taught me something new, gave me a skillset to work with and gave me an opportunity. Eight years later and I am still employed in the field of that skillset she taught me.

Since my release from prison on August 8, 2005, I have had no further criminal charges or traffic citations. I have worked hard. Created a new life for my daughter and I.

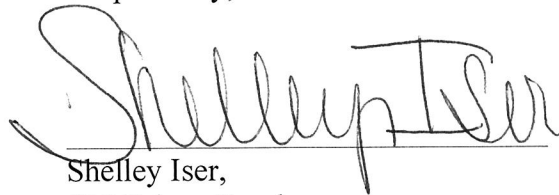
For the past fourteen years I have been denied employment, school functions, notary commission, housing, social involvement and licensing. As I mentioned, I am a single mother, working a full time job. Being a productive member of society. Paying my taxes. Trying my hardest every single day to be the best person I can. Yet, because of my record, I am continually denied employment; not even fast food establishments will hire a felon. School parties and field trips with my daughter; having a felony on your record bans you from participating in school events and field trips. Notary commission; It doesn't matter how many years ago or how many professionals provide a positive reference for you, your request is denied, because fourteen years ago you made a mistake. Career choices; Yes, you can attend college; you can even graduate with a perfect GPA, but your not going to get that job, because fourteen years ago you made a mistake. Concealed Carry Permit, as a single mother and homeowner, I would like to have a way

to protect my daughter and I from an intruder, but I can't, because fourteen years ago I made a mistake. Anything and everything that requires a background check, you are denied.

Society elected a Judge to determine punishment for those who break the law. I served every day of my sentence, no early release. I do not regret going to prison, it made me who I am today, but how long do I have to suffer the consequences? A life long punishment for a sentence that I already served? Society and the Judge determined that my sentence was two years, but I am still being punished to this day, fourteen years later. One bad decision, one mistake, does not define who you are as a person.

Thank you for the chance and the hope, to one day be viewed as the productive member of society that I have worked so hard to be.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Shelley Iser". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above a horizontal line.

Shelley Iser,  
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