

PUBLIC COMMENTS

HB 3547

HOUSE COMMITTEE ON CORRECTIONS

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Hearing Date: April 14, 2021 8:00 AM

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Diana Briseno, BSW,LCDC  
StateWide Leadership Council  
Houston, TX

My name is Diana Briseno New Wings is truly needed to give hope to those who have legal issues and for people like me. I have not had legal issues in 27 1/2 years. I was released from deferred probation 5 years versus 10 years but until this day my record still shows my misdemeanors and felony received between 1992-1993 my last arrest being in 1993. I have been an alcohol and drug counselor for 24 years and I am a new social worker. I always have to write letters and explain my past. All of my arrest were due to my drug addiction in my past. I have clean and sober 27 1/2 years and I am a Social Work Graduate student as well. I have done all I can to turn my life around and be there for my family and to help others. Please support and pass HB 3547 for those of who have complied with all of our stipulations past the 10 years under the bill. HB 3547 would help so many men and women obtain jobs to support their families and obtain apartments to house their families. Thank you Representative Allen.  
Diana Briseno, BSW, LCDC

Karen Page  
Myself and my Family  
San Angelo, TX

I support this bill and ask that you do also. This bill is common sense. Thank you.

Erica Roberts  
Self, Law Student  
Austin, TX

I write this comment in support of the New Wings Bill. Communities of color are more likely to be policed and prosecuted than their white neighbors, resulting in less access to employment opportunities going forward. Expanding nondisclosure eligibility is a necessary step to begin rectifying the racial inequities of our criminal justice system. A conviction in someone's past should not prevent them from moving forward with their life.

Koretta Brown  
Texas Organizing Project  
Missouri City, TX

Texas Organizing Project support HB3547

Veronica Morales  
Self  
Dallas, TX

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Please favorably consider HB 3547 relating to nondisclosure of criminal records. This bill would expand record sealing services to Texans who have completed their sentences but still carry the barriers and burdens of a criminal record.

While they have completed their “debt to society” as ordered by the court, they still face discrimination that accompanies criminal records when it comes to employment (that offers a living wage), and acceptable housing (in decent neighborhoods). Under this “New Wings” bill nondisclosure eligibility would be expanded to include all people who have fully discharged their sentences after a crime-free waiting period of up to 10 years (the length of which varies depending on the original conviction).

This would be an important step in reducing recidivism by keeping the previously incarcerated (who have proven by their good behavior to be serious about not re-offending) in environments that are not drug and crime-ridden. The “New Wings” bill opens doors of opportunity currently not available to so many!

Thank you for giving this bill a chance to be heard in committee, and we ask that you vote favorably.

Mark Anthony Vasquez, Mr.  
Statewide Leadership Council  
Weslaco, TX

April 13th, 2021

Dear Chairman Murr, esteemed Members of the House Committee on Corrections,

I reach out today asking if a favorable consideration be given in support of HB 3547, known as the New Wings Act. To the many of us who have completed our sentences, HB 3547 proves encouraging. I send word here today in support of HB 3547 because to the many of us who still carry the burdens and barriers so closely associated with a criminal record, the New Wings Act provides us an opportunity for private growth by expanding record sealing services. To so many of us in Texas, this is promising.

Under New Wings, nondisclosure eligibility would be expanded to include all people who have fully discharged their sentences - after a crime-free period of up to 10 years, the length of which varies depending upon the original conviction. I stand here this 87th Legislative Session with the Statewide Leadership Council asking if HB 3547 be given favorable consideration.

I feel HB 3547 opens great doors of access and opportunity currently unavailable to so many of us in Texas. Because record sealing is like growing new wings, we refer to this bill as the New Wings Act. That we be granted hope and opportunity and one day fly amid the same fluid heights as each and all is the reason we send word today asking if you may not look to the New Wings Act with support and favor. Perhaps, in so doing, we may find equal depth in each our daily horizons and make our way through the hours of our days with our own metered growth at our heels, that we may build upon this 87th Legislative Session and cultivate a brighter future for ourselves.

I thank you warmly for taking the time to read our comments, as well, we thank you for giving this bill a chance to be heard in committee. We ask that you look favorably upon HB 3547. We ask that the New Wings Act be given favorable consideration.

Thank you, kindly.

Sincerely,

Mark Anthony Vasquez  
Rio Grande Valley, Texas

Wolfself sittler  
Texas Inmate Families Association  
austin, TX

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Dear Corrections Committee Member,

Why add your voice to the favorable consideration of HB3547? Primarily because it is completely in line with the stated mission of the TDCJ:

"The mission of the TDCJ is to provide public safety, promote positive change in offender behavior, reintegrate offenders into society, and assist victims of crime".

With at least 50,000 individuals released every year from TDCJ facilities, the need to remove existing barriers to employment, housing, financial aid, etc. is pressing. In order to successfully integrate formerly incarcerated individuals, doors need to be opened rather than closed. This is no less true for a new parolee than it is for that individual who has been out for years and made a successful adjustment.

Our state will best be served when those who have been held accountable for their behavior and paid the price have full access to the American dream.

Your support of HB 3547 will open more doors of opportunity.

Thank you for your consideration of this.

Wolf Sittler 1403 Kenwood Ave Austin, TX 512 447-2150

Laurie Pherigo

self - Advocate for Criminal Justice Reform

Dripping Springs, TX

I am writing to ask for your favorable consideration of HB 3547 (The New Wings Act). New Wings would expand record sealing services to the many Texans who have completed their sentences but still carry the barriers and burdens of a criminal record. Under New Wings, nondisclosure eligibility would be expanded to include all people who have fully discharged their sentences after a crime-free waiting period of up to 10 years, the length of which varies depending on the original conviction.

It is antithetical to the entire moral premise of our country to punish people over and over and over again for the same offense. Many of our ancestors came to this country because they couldn't get a fair shake in their countries of origin. They needed a second chance, and they came to this country and proved themselves worthy of that second chance. I can only speak on my own behalf, but I have proven myself deserving of that second chance. Since my release from prison, I haven't had any serious encounters with law enforcement, except when they knock on my door to verify my registry, or when I go in every year to register. I have maintained gainful employment. I have stable relationships with family and friends. Is my life perfect? Of course not. But my life is virtually indistinguishable from my many friends who have never been convicted of a crime.

Now this bill, as I understand it, will not apply to folks with offenses like mine, but it's a start. It encourages you and the general public to see us as people, not as "criminals" or "ex-cons". It cements the principal that while actions have consequences, those consequences are finite. It's not right to make everyone who has ever been convicted of a crime serve a life sentence, regardless of what the jury decides. We should be able to find housing and employment and participate fully in our civic duties and communities, once we have proven that we can be trusted.

I once said at a Commissioner's Court meeting that "we must bring everyone into community, because it is only when we are all in community that we all will be safe." This bill provides a way to bring us back into the larger community and into full participation in life, on an equal playing field with those who haven't been convicted of a crime.

We refer to this bill as the "New Wings Act", because record sealing is like growing new wings. It opens up doors of opportunity currently not available to many of us. It will give us hope that one day we will fly.

Laurie Pherigo

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Rhonda Gilbert  
Self retired  
Brownwood, TX

My name is rhonda Gilbert. I fully support this bill. Society expects persons to change and become functioning members of society. I have a 19 year drug charge. I was release from a successful parole with no reprimands. But this criminal history still torments me and my family after all these years of doing the right thing. Not only myself but, my granddaughters are traumatized. And in therapy emotionalt distraut in foster homes by Cps , I filed for kinship but because grammas criminal history 19 years ago ,I was denied custody. There is no reason for them to be in foster care. I am a functioning member of society .The children are the ones suffering.

Elizabeth Henry  
Self; Policy Fellow  
Round Rock, TX

I am writing to ask for your favorable consideration of HB 3547 (The New Wings Act). New Wings would expand record sealing services to the many Texans who have completed their sentences but still carry the barriers and burdens of a criminal record. Under New Wings, nondisclosure eligibility would be expanded to include all people who have fully discharged their sentences after a crime-free waiting period of up to 10 years, the length of which varies depending on the original conviction.

We refer to this bill as the “New Wings Act”, because record sealing is like growing new wings. It opens up doors of opportunity currently not available to many of us. It will give us hope that one day we will fly.

Thank you for giving this bill a chance to be heard in committee, and we ask that you vote favorably.

Darwin Hamilton  
Reentry Advocacy Project/Self  
Pflugerville, TX

Dear Chairman, Murr and Members of the House Committee on Corrections:

I am writing to ask for your favorable consideration of HB 3547 (The New Wings Act). New Wings would expand record sealing services to the many Texans who have completed their sentences but still carry the barriers and burdens of a criminal record. Under New Wings, nondisclosure eligibility would be expanded to include all people who have fully discharged their sentences after a crime-free waiting period of up to 10 years, the length of which varies depending on the original conviction.

I support this bill because I'm someone who was released on parole March 2, 1998, after spending 5.5 year incarcerated, followed by successfully completing 17 years of parole on March 2, 2015, for an egregious 22.5 sentence for a 1st time felony non-violent drug offense. Even now as someone who was honored by the House of Representatives of the 86th Texas Legislature in April 2019 for Second Chance Month, I still face barriers. Even now, almost 29 years later since my arrest, as someone who's been off parole for 6 years and celebrates 23 years out of prison. I still have the burden of being held accountable by employers, apartment managers, licensing boards, agencies, admissions etc. to address offenses that have been adjudicated 3 decades ago.

This is inconsistent with the language and values that once a person has paid their debt to society for a determinate sentence, it's over and they should be able to move on with their lives. Therefore, I ask that you all vote favorably for this piece of legislation. Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

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Darwin Hamilton  
Co-founder, Reentry Advocacy Project

Susan Luke

self

MAGNOLIA, TX

My name is Susan Luke and I was incarcerated in TDC for a crime committed. I fully served my time including parole successfully. My completion year was 2001. I still suffer the backlash of that time and title of a felon. This bill would help me in so many ways, one being employment with a future. I have NOT committed any offense during the past 20 years but that record still holds me back. I am an honest, hardworking single woman who cares for and supports her 88 year old mother. A sealed record would give me the opportunity to have a better employment opportunity in order to serve myself, mother and community as a productive citizen of such.

Please consider and support this bill for not only myself but others who ARE PRODUCTIVE CITIZENS IN THIS SOCIETY.

Amanda Cassidy

Self

New Braunfels, TX

I support this bill because having an opportunity to move forward from my convictions would allow me the chance to truly live as a responsible and productive citizen without the barriers of my past keeping me from gaining housing and a livable wage.

Mark Anthony Vasquez, Mr.

Statewide Leadership Council

Weslaco, TX

April 14th, 2021

Esteemed Chairman Murr and Members of the House Committee on Corrections,

My name is Mark Anthony Vasquez and I stand here today with the Statewide Leadership Council on behalf of HB 3547 – also known as the New Wings Act.

Personally, I cannot refrain from feeling a profound sense of hope knowing that - for so many of us - our now years-long struggle may find it's end this 87th Legislative Session. The very thought of the wide-range of Texans who would find benefit with the passing of New Wings serves to encourage most our endearment. It is the reason I reach out to you today.

Certainly our communities will benefit from New Wings, for nearly half of children in the U.S. have a parent with a criminal record, restricting access to employment, stable housing, and educational opportunities. New Wings would also expand record sealing services to the many Texans who have completed their sentences but who still carry the barriers and burdens of a criminal record. Under New Wings, nondisclosure eligibility would be expanded to include all people who have fully discharged their sentences after a crime-free waiting period of up to 10 years (the length of which would depend upon the original conviction). Also, there is evidence that people who receive record clearing services have very low recidivism rates, sometimes even lower than the average adult crime rates. And so, by reducing incarceration rates, Texas would be granted an opportunity to save money on the criminal justice system, allowing for an opportunity to reinvest tax dollars elsewhere.

The passing of HB 3547 will afford so many of those formerly incarcerated like myself an opportunity to look to our own uninhibited skies, to move on to promising new heights as one independent working-body with the collateral burden of imprisonment behind us and with equal access to the very same avenues of public growth granted all Texans. Many of us will now have a new chance to build upon better days as productive and aspiring members of our communities.

I write today asking if you may look favorably upon HB 3547 because we feel New Wings will open the doors of opportunity

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currently unavailable to many of us. May it be here and now this 87th Legislative Session the moment in time we may be granted an opportunity to find release from the yoke of imprisonment. May it be here and now we find an opportunity to soar the same unbridled heights as all Texans. You see, with the passing of HB 3547 we may wake to the morning light with a newest horizon awaiting us, where we may take flight and reach our own place as Texans among our own independently quartered growth and development.

We appreciate you having taken the time with us. For giving this bill a chance to be heard in committee, for taking a moment to give HB 3547 fair consideration, for taking a moment to address our concerns on New Wings, for all you do – thank you.

Mark A. Vasquez  
Rio Grande Valley

Lauren Byrd-moreno

Self

Silsbee, TX

I am for this bill. This bill could help individuals who are trying to do better and have proven themselves to be living a crime free life to provide not only for themselves but for their families. I am the spouse of someone with a criminal record who would benefit from this bill if passed. I myself do not have a criminal record but this bill would effect where I live, where we can afford to live, where our children would be able to live, and provide my spouse a greater opportunity to provide for our family.