

From the House

State Ends Use of Welfare Liens

By Rep. Matt Ritter

It was a top priority and it went early in the legislative session – ending the state's shortsighted and hurtful policy of using liens to force people to repay public assistance support they received in the past. Known as welfare liens, I call the policy a secret "poverty tax" that has been destroying lives and families for decades and it had to stop.

This legislation is also a great example of our community coming together to raise awareness about an issue that frankly many legislators either didn't understand its full impact or even know existed at all. Thanks to the hard work of people like Reverend AJ Johnson of the Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance, Sarah White of the Connecticut Fair Housing Center and Cori Mackey of the Center for Leadership and Justice, the entire legislature was put on notice and the result was an overwhelming vote to repeal the use of welfare liens.

Essentially the new law requires the state to release all current state liens on real property related to public assistance and prevents the state from placing new liens on real property. These liens had been the most common type of method of assistance recovery and it effectively prevents new homeowners from building equity and wealth for themselves and their families.

This archaic policy has been counterproductive to the goal of many state programs, which are designed to help lift people up. By treating public assistance like debt, we only perpetuate the cycle of poverty.

We should be working harder to find more ways to encourage people to improve their lives, not discourage or penalize them for it. Government's challenges to the problems facing society are ongoing, and ending the use of punitive welfare liens is an important example of how our state can evolve for the better.

Please contact me if I can ever be of any assistance. I can be reached at Matthew.Ritter@cga.ct.gov, on Facebook [@RepresentativeMattRitter](https://www.facebook.com/RepresentativeMattRitter) or by phone at (860) 240-8489, if you have any questions or concerns.