



Legislative Testimony
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**Written Testimony Supporting Increasing Funding
For Inmate Medical Services for the
Department of Correction, in House Bill 5005, An Act
Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2021**

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Gus Marks-Hamilton and I am a field organizer for the Smart Justice campaign with the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am here to testify in support of increased funding for inmate medical services in the Department of Corrections budget within House Bill 5005, An Act Adjusting the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30, 2021.

The Smart Justice campaign is led by people who, like me, have been directly impacted by the criminal legal system. Our experiences as formerly incarcerated people shape our values and guide our positions. We know that people incarcerated in Connecticut have dignity and fundamental human rights, and state laws and policies should support both. Furthermore, Connecticut has a constitutional obligation to provide appropriate medical care for people who are incarcerated. We ask the Appropriations Committee to recognize and honor those values when reviewing how to adequately fund healthcare services in the Department of Correction.

There is a healthcare crisis in Connecticut's prisons and jails. It is estimated that two-thirds of people incarcerated in state prisons and local jails have drug

dependencies.¹ According to the CDC, 1 in 3 incarcerated people in the US has Hepatitis C.² Chronic health conditions, such as asthma and hypertension, and mental health disorders also affect incarcerated people at rates that far exceed their prevalence in the general population.³ Despite incarcerated people's health needs, as of July 2019, there was only one medical provider for every 579 inmates in Connecticut.⁴ As of January of this year, the Office of Fiscal Analysis found that there was a \$15.3 million deficiency in the inmate medical services account.⁵

I have experienced the inadequacies of the mental health system in Connecticut prisons and know firsthand how frustrating it can be to actively seek out mental health services but wait months for treatment while I continued to suffer. If our state is going to incarcerate people, then it also has an obligation to provide the people it has chosen to imprison with the screening, diagnoses, treatment, and other health resources they need to lead healthy lives in and outside of prison and jail.

Funding for adequate healthcare service for people who are incarcerated is critical no matter its source. I note, though, that Northern Correctional Institution, a facility that housed just 76 incarcerated people as of the past fall,⁶ had significant overtime costs that contributed to DOC's \$38.2 million overtime expenses for the

¹ Steve Horn, "Opioid epidemic impacts prisons and jails." Prison Legal News (Sept. 5, 2019), *available at* <https://www.prisonlegalnews.org/news/2019/sep/5/opioid-epidemic-impacts-prisons-and-jails/>.

² Centers for Disease Control, "Hepatitis C & Incarceration." U.S. Dep't. of Health & Human Servs. (Oct. 2013), *available at* <https://www.cdc.gov/hepatitis/hcv/pdfs/hepcincarcerationfactsheet.pdf>.

³ Ank E. Nijhawan, "Infections Diseases and the Criminal Justice System: A Public Health Perspective." *Am. J. Med. Sci.* (Oct. 2016), *available at* <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5119815/>.

⁴ Jenna Carlesso and Kelan Lyons, "One year after DOC took over inmate health care, troubles persist." *CT Mirror* (July 2, 2019), *available at* <https://ctmirror.org/2019/12/28/best-of-2019-one-year-after-doc-took-over-inmate-health-care-troubles-persist/>.

⁵ FY 20 General Fund Agency Deficiencies. Office of Fiscal Analysis (Jan. 27, 2020), *available at* https://www.cga.ct.gov/ofa/Documents/Year/PROJ/2020PROJ-20200127_January%2027%2C%202020%20Agency%20Deficiencies.pdf.

⁶ Kelan Lyons, "Prisoner population tumbles at maximum-security Northern Correctional Institution." *CT Mirror* (Sept. 6, 2019), *available at* <https://www.courant.com/politics/hc-pol-northern-correctional-institution-20190909-ghykpzf5jdp3otatzcas3x2em-story.html>.

second quarter of fiscal year 2020.⁷ Closing just this one facility could free up funds that would be well-spent on healthcare for incarcerated people.

Smart Justice strongly urges this committee to expand the healthcare services available to incarcerated people by increasing the healthcare budget of the Department of Correction, including its budget for preventative care. Untreated medical conditions will follow people back into the community, ultimately affecting all of us. On behalf of the Smart Justice campaign of the ACLU-CT, I strongly urge this committee to increase DOC's healthcare funding so it can provide adequate healthcare to incarcerated people.

Thank you.

⁷ Agency Overtime Report. Office of Fiscal Analysis (July-Dec. 2019), *available at* <https://www.cga.ct.gov/ofa/Documents/year/OT/2020OT-20200108Agency%20Overtime%20Report%20FY%2020%20Q2.pdf>.