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Before the Appropriations Committee

Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations committee. My name is Gerard Gagner, and I work at Carl Robinson Correctional Institution and Corrigan-Radgowski Correction Center, where I function as the principal psychiatrist for each facility.

I have worked for the State as a psychiatrist in the prison system since June, 2008. I strive to provide high quality mental health care to those Connecticut citizens who have been remanded to the CT Department of Correction. Although it is unfortunate that persons have come to me in the prison system for treatment, as opposed to finding care at liberty with outpatient providers, I do believe that I possess the capacity to help those who are motivated for change. While I see a disproportionate amount of substance abuse, I also see quite ill patients suffering with bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, and depression, among other mental illnesses. Corrections is an environment that unfortunately sees some of the most ill patients I have ever treated, but I do think that my colleagues and I in the prison system provide high quality healthcare in a manner that not only treats underlying substance abuse and mental illness, but that finally stabilizes people and prepares them to move forward in their lives, to reconnect with society in a way that they are better fathers, better husbands, better workers and generally better citizens.

Those goals, which generally I have in mind with all the inmates who I manage within the CT Department of Correction, certainly are made more challenging when I am responsible for more and more inmates. That means the care I deliver shifts from chronic disease management to more of an acute management model, in which simple stabilization, and not rehabilitation, becomes the focus.

I absolutely appreciate the very challenging financial environment under which you in the Legislature and the Governor operate. After all, my being a Connecticut resident means I know, full well, what the burden of increased taxes and simultaneously shrinking monies for basic services means to the State of Connecticut. But I do view careful, thoughtful and robust acute funding of healthcare in the prison system as a long-term investment in the State, in citizens who find themselves in the unfortunate position of being incarcerated, and also in the families who are no longer supported by their incarcerated family members and in society that must reintegrate the many inmates who eventually return to the streets.

For this reason I ask that you please continue to protect and increase funding for inmate healthcare. Thank you.