



February 11, 2020
Shanya Graham, Correctional Nurse
MacDougall-Walker CI, DOC
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Committee. My name is Shanya Graham. I've been a correctional nurse for almost 13 years for the Department of Corrections.

My aspirations to become a nurse began during my freshman year in high school. I wanted to help people heal as well as promote health and wellness in individuals. I graduated from Southern Connecticut State University in 2006 for nursing and began working within the Department of Corrections in July of 2007. While employed within the department, I also obtained my Master's Degree in Nursing Education in May of 2016. Since 2007, I have been providing direct nursing care, patient education, and patient advocacy to the inmate population housed at MacDougall Walker, a maximum security facility that houses nearly 2000 inmates and the "hub" facility for inmates with the highest acuity and most complex medical issues. I am here today to thank you for appropriating funds for inmate healthcare in last year's budget. Since the change from CMHC to DOC, inmates have been able to move forward in their medical care through proper diagnostic testing, treatment regimens, and necessary follow-ups. Because of this, we have been able to prevent complications and prolong life. We know that progress is being made and are here to ask you to protect and continue to increase funding for inmate healthcare.

Since 2007, our nursing staff has decreased due to budget cuts as well as retirements, terminations, and resignations. As nurses, we took an oath to provide care to all our patients, because we are caring, compassionate, empathetic people. We believe our patients should have the best quality of care and health outcomes that we can provide, even in the midst of short staffing, drafting, long hours, burnout, and frustration, which are some of the physical and mental strains we struggle with daily. We don't want our patients to suffer due to lack of resources, but we can only do what we can in the allotted time in each shift.

As a correctional nurse at MacDougall-Walker, I personally work under constraint most days. Today, we have less staff to care for the same amount of inmates and perform the same amount of work compared to 2007. Because of the reduction in staffing, I have to prioritize my care for the shift, resulting in the exclusion of inmates who should have been seen for a medical problem. For example, I will carry out physician orders (medications, treatments), perform duties related to facility operations (transfers, intakes), and respond to facility emergencies (codes) for my shift. With all of these responsibilities, there is no time to perform nursing sick, which is a routine process where inmates submit a written request detailing a medical complaint to be seen in clinic. Because of the staff shortage, we are prolonging wait times, further complicating illness, and delaying care. In one occasion, an inmate was sent to the emergency room due to complaints of weakness and numbness on one side of his body. He was diagnosed with Transischemic Attack (TIA). This patient had also written a sick call request prior to complaining to staff. This was a result of prolonged wait time, furthering complication, and delayed care due to nursing staff

shortage. If nursing was fully staffed, he would've been seen in sick call, eliminating the need for a trip to the emergency room. I'm concerned about other inmates who have been pushed back in the sick call process due to time constraints and short staffing. I'm concerned about the complications that could be prevented, if only we could just see every inmate scheduled for sick call in a timely manner.

Proper nursing staff levels are critical to deliver safe and effective health care. We cannot continue to risk the lives and health status of staff and patients due to underfunding. We need to protect and continue to increase funding for inmate healthcare. We are legally and ethically bound to care for our patients. Please help us to deliver this care efficiently by providing the necessary funds for health care services.

Thank you.