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February 11, 2020
Melissa Winiarz LCSW
Willard-Cybulski CI, DOC
Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, and members of the Committee, my name is Melissa Winiarz and I am a Clinical Social Worker for the Department of Correction and UCONN's Correctional Managed Healthcare for almost 10 years.

I am here today to thank you for appropriating funds for inmate healthcare in last year's budget. I hope you all are able to realize the impact you are having on the lives of those that work in Corrections but also the lives that we service. Since I sat in front of you last year, great strides have been made in my Functional Unit of Carl Robinson, Willard-Cybulski & Northern Correctional Institutions. We are now fully staffed with mental health clinicians, including the addition of 2 new clinicians and a psychologist. This has made a tremendous difference in the quality of care that we are able to provide to the inmates in our care. This translates more opportunities to participate in therapeutic groups and more frequent counseling sessions due to adequate staffing and less pressure on staff. I have seen firsthand the impact that this has on inmates who are preparing to re-enter society. We know that progress is being made and are here to ask you to protect and continue to increase funding for inmate healthcare.

Yet, there is still work to be done. Psychiatry is a vital aspect of mental health care and we are still heavily understaffed with Mental Health APRNS and psychiatrists not only at my facility but across the state. When inmates who have been diagnosed with severe mental illness are not provided appropriate psychiatric care, they are more difficult to manage behaviorally, have a higher risk for suicidality, and are more prone to violence. When these inmates leave our care and return to the community, they face higher rates for addiction, homelessness, and recidivism. It is imperative to public safety to provide adequate Mental Health care to the inmates of Connecticut Department of Correction.

Please continue to support the progress that has been made and the continued work to be done by maintaining the current budget for Health Services in the Department of Correction. Thank you.