



Legislative Testimony
765 Asylum Avenue, First Floor
Hartford, CT 06105
860-523-9146
www.acluct.org

Written Testimony Supporting Senate Bill 987, An Act Concerning Reinvestment through a Reduction in Correctional Facility Population into Reentry and Community-Based Services and Programs

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Ranking Members Kissel and Fishbein, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Claudine Fox, and I am the interim director of public policy and advocacy for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am testifying in support of Senate Bill 987, An Act Concerning Reinvestment through a Reduction in Correctional Facility Population into Reentry and Community-Based Services and Programs.

The ACLU-CT is an organization dedicated to ending mass incarceration and the disparate effects of mass incarceration on Black and brown Connecticut residents. One of the best uses of funds in Connecticut is to divest from policing and incarceration and reallocate those funds back into people and communities harmed by the systemically racist institution of mass incarceration.

The Governor has committed to closing Northern Correctional Institution (Northern) by the summer of 2021, and other Department of Correction (DOC) prisons through 2022, saving approximately \$15.4 million in annual operating costs in 2022 and \$41.5 million in 2023.¹ The Governor's budget reallocates that money into a poorly defined "CREATES" fund which appears to be used to close the tax gap and other general fund purposes. Northern is a prison that has perpetrated great harm to the people who have been incarcerated there, and indeed all incarcerated

¹ Governor Lamont's February 2021 Budget Proposal for the FY 2022 – FYI 2023 Biennial Budget, at B-70, available at https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/OPM/Budget/2022_2023_Biennial_Budget/Bud_WebPage/GovBud_2022-23_Final_Web_Update.pdf.

people, since it opened in 1995. The money saved from closing it should not be directed at potholes and pensions, but instead should be reallocated into tangible benefits for people caught up in the criminal legal system.

Senate Bill 987 recognizes that the savings from closing Northern and other prisons should be applied to take care of the health and housing needs of people who are leaving DOC custody and reentering the community. It also allocates some of the funding to non-police services to help avoid people from becoming incarcerated in the first place. These benefits include improved access to healthcare and better-funded healthcare services, both mental and physical, for people reentering their communities from DOC custody. Reentry services also receive a portion of the money reallocated away from Northern and other closing facilities, by expanding reentry services via reentry case management social workers and reentry housing assistance, including case management, housing search, temporary rental assistance, and more. This bill also reallocates prison operation funds to prevention, intended to ensure that no person will enter incarceration just because they are in mental health crisis, by funding the state's mobile crisis intervention services to be available around the clock and across the state.

One aspect of reinvestment that this bill does not address, but should, is to ensure that people harmed by incarceration in Connecticut are given dignity and opportunity. One way to do this is to ensure that people have a light at the end of the tunnel via Clean Slate automatic record erasures – a proposal this Committee is hearing today in Senate Bill 1019. That bill, and this one, could both be strengthened by ensuring that funding for the process of automated record erasure is guaranteed, from money reallocated from DOC prison closures. We believe that the dignity inherent in record erasure is a key component of the reinvestment concept of Senate Bill 987. Funding Clean Slate record erasure is a direct and important way to reinvest in the people most harmed by incarceration. Reallocating money from the state's sole supermax prison and into remedying harms of the criminal legal system is a just and moral use of these funds.

The ACLU-CT urges this Committee to support the reinvestment concept proposed in this bill. Moving money that formerly propped up symbols of mass incarceration and its harms into the people who experienced those harms is not just good policy, but a strong message about Connecticut's priorities. At the ACLU-CT we believe in people, not prisons. Senate Bill 987 gives the legislature the chance to invest in people, not prisons. Putting the money saved from closing Northern and other prisons into healthcare services for incarcerated and reentering people, into mobile crisis units that serve as an alternative to police intervention, into ensuring housing for people leaving detention, and into a light at the end of the tunnel for people with records through Clean Slate record erasure is the best way to support people, not prisons. Please support Senate Bill 987 to make a future that builds up people, not prisons.