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SEIU 1199NE
Before the Judiciary Committee

In Support of SB 987: AN ACT CONCERNING REINVESTMENT OF SAVINGS ACHIEVED THROUGH A REDUCTION IN CORRECTIONAL FACILITY POPULATION INTO REENTRY AND COMMUNITY-BASED SERVICES AND PROGRAMS

Good Morning Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom and members of the Committee, my name is Indria Mitto and I am a discharge planner at Osborn Correctional Institute. I have worked in DOC for 13 years. My job as a discharge planner: help prepare inmates for their release from prison, help them to acquire the skills and programs needed for stability and successfully rejoining our communities. I'm here today to testify in support of Senate Bill 987.

My co-workers and I were very disappointed in the Governor's budget because of the lack of access to reentry services that the Governor has proposed in his budget. Because of this, District 1199 has joined the Justice Reinvestment Coalition to demand that we fight for equity for justice impacted people in Connecticut. We demand investment of current and future DOC dollars into resources such as assistance finding and retaining housing, expanding medical and behavioral health services in the community, funding criminal record erasure, and creating a 24/7 mobile crisis unit to respond to people in mental health crisis. This will help avoid criminalization and incarceration in the first place.

Our demand to expand reentry services is a demand for racial justice. Statistics show the state disproportionately incarcerates people of color. The population we serve – people of every color but especially black and brown – often have very acute medical and mental health needs. This means that on a daily basis I am constantly making sure inmates being released have active orders for medication, appointments, insurance, etc.

Over the last several years, we have been cut to the bone, along with other critical medical and mental health services for inmates. We can't simply restore these services – we must expand the reentry services that people need, especially now that more individuals are getting released due to the pandemic. We need more supports for people when they leave prison: housing, employment, mental health and, medical care. Only with these community supports will individuals have a chance to succeed.

I see firsthand how the absence of robust reentry services for the formerly incarcerated reinforces structural racism. Because of the huge barriers that communities of color face in terms of employment, housing, healthcare, and education; people of color who are

leaving prison and trying to reenter their communities lack the support systems necessary to do so. Making a situation even worse, these people have to grapple with nonviolent charges like smoking marijuana.

The systems in our society have failed people – especially people of color – and sends them to prison. Prison is what happens when people don't have their basic needs met – and it also is what sends people back to prison. We need the programs, the people to follow them, the people to encourage them, and assist them so they can be successful. Please support Senate Bill 987. Thank you for your time.