



TESTIMONY OF
JERRY SMART
IN SUPPORT OF RAISED BILL NO. 987 (Justice Reinvestment)

March 10, 2021

Thank you to Chairman Winfield, Chairman Stafstrom, and all of the members of the Judiciary Committee, for holding this hearing.

My name is Jerry Smart and I am the Senior Community Health Worker at the Transitions Clinic Program in New Haven. I coordinate medical care and social service support for chronically ill patients recently released from prison. I am testifying in support of Raised Bill No. 987, which would reinvest funds saved from the closing of Northern CI to community to the needs of people leaving incarceration, including reentry coordination, housing, and hiring of community health workers for people leaving incarceration.

As a society, we tend to put health care on the back burner, but most of the patients that I see never had a primary care physician. It has been 30 years since I did time, but I remember feeling judged by doctors and thinking they didn't care about my well-being. Our patients have been dealing with probation, parole, and dealing with correctional officers. For that reason, they don't trust people. When they meet me, I just let them know that we have a great team. I let them know that the physicians care about them, and that they care about their needs. Once they buy into me, then they buy into the whole thing.

No one wants to be sick. But the whole health care system can be intimidating. Community health workers break down that fear. We go with patients to their appointments, check in with on the phone, and take calls at all hours.

There is no natural source of funding for hiring formerly-incarcerated community health workers. It is a great thing that Northern CI has been closed, I hope that the state will use that money to provide more funds to support people who need it most, like our Transitions patients.

Sincerely,

Jerry Smart