

RE: Proposed AN ACT CONCERNING COMMUNITY RESPONSE TEAMS AND REENTRY CENTERS No. 572

Statement of Neil M. O'Leary, Mayor, City of Waterbury,

Senator Bradley, Senator Champagne, Representative Horn, Representative Green and members of the Public Safety and Security Committee:

Thank you for accepting my statement in support of Proposed Senate Bill No. 572, An Act Concerning Community Crisis Response Teams and Reentry Centers. I respectfully request your support so that the bill can be voted on and approved by the General Assembly.

People returning home from incarceration are disproportionately affected by issues related to housing, employment, substance use disorder, mental illness, and chronic medical illness. According to the Connecticut correctional facility count on September 10<sup>th</sup>, 2020 there were a total of 759 sentenced males and 39 sentenced females from the Greater Waterbury region who were incarcerated. Of these 798 sentenced individuals, 645 men and 29 women reported the City of Waterbury as their town of residence at the time of their intake into the facility. The number of sentenced men from Waterbury is about 8.4 percent of the total number of men (n=8992) and 7.4 percent of the total number of women (n=525) who were incarcerated in CT on the same date.

In addition, between 2015 and June of 2020, a total of 1,586 individuals released at their End of Sentence listed Waterbury as their place of residence. Some of these individuals have and continue to be released into Work Release Programs, also known as halfway houses. The City of Waterbury is home to 216 state Department of Correction halfway house beds. This number represents the most halfway house beds of any municipality in the State of Connecticut.

This past year, I had the opportunity to meet with Beth Hines who serves as Chairwoman of the Greater Waterbury Re-Entry Council, and Executive Director of Community Partners in Action. The Greater Waterbury Re-Entry Council is a collaboration of federal, state, local organizations, and individuals that provide information, resources, and support that help returning citizens achieve productive and purposeful lives. In addition to sharing with me information about the great work already being done by the Reentry Council to support returning citizens, Beth and I discussed the council's vision of opening a Waterbury Re-Entry Center, akin to that operated by the City of Hartford. Two weeks ago yesterday, I along with former State Representative Reginald Beamon had the opportunity to tour the City of Hartford's Re-Entry Center, and see firsthand the life changing services that are offered at their facility.

For those that are unfamiliar with the Hartford Re-Entry Center, it was opened in September 2018 by Community Partners in Action, Mayor Luke Bronin's Office and over forty community

partners. Since opening in September 2018 the Center has served over 700 people, despite being funded at a level that would allow up to 150 people to be served annually.

My recent tour reaffirmed in my mind the pressing need for a Re-Entry Center in Waterbury to provide services that reduce the risk of recidivism for residents who have been released from prison at the end of their sentence.

SB 572 will support Reentry Welcome Centers in a comprehensive effort to provide better opportunities to men and women returning home from incarceration. It is vital that the state provides communities with the resources to ensure that formerly incarcerated men and women have access to treatment, services, and programs, especially on their day of release. This is a unique opportunity to advocate for funding and ongoing support from the state to ensure that these programs can be sustained, and I respectfully ask for your support.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.