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**Testimony Supporting SB 572: An Act Concerning Community
Crisis Response Teams and Reentry Centers.
Legislative Office Building**

February 8, 2021

Representative Maria Horn, Senator Dennis Bradley, Senator Catherine Osten, Representative Alphonse Paolillo, and distinguished members of the Public Safety and Security Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today. My name is Deborah Rogala, and I am the Director of Operations for Community Partners in Action.

Community Partners in Action is one of the oldest organizations of its kind in the country. We were founded nearly 150 years ago and champion criminal justice reform while advocating for preserving human dignity. Through our programs that include reentry and housing, youth initiatives, a nationally recognized Prison Arts Program, and holistic alternatives to incarceration, we provide long-term positive impact for nearly 7000 individuals annually. The majority of our programs are located in Hartford, including the Hartford Reentry Welcome Center located on the ground floor of City Hall.

Community Partners in Action supports SB 572 because it will tackle issues that disproportionately affect communities of color. The Community Crisis Response Team will limit unneeded contact with law enforcement by dispatching appropriately qualified professionals to respond to 9-1-1 and non-emergency calls related to welfare checks, homelessness, substance use disorder and mental health crises. This program will create a support system to deal with individuals that should not be incarcerated but provided with the opportunity to get connected to treatment, services, and programs during their moments of crisis. This social service approach to law enforcement will reduce the incarceration rate and divert people from unnecessary visits to the emergency room. Police have been tasked with responding to many social issues that they are inappropriately equipped for. As the nation and state call for social justice and reimagining policing, SB 572 seeks to enhance first responses and reduce repeat emergency calls, while getting constituents the help that police officers do not have the training, resources or time to provide.

We also support SB 572 because it is the first step to ensuring that women and men returning home from incarceration have better chances to successfully reintegrate into society. People returning home from incarceration are disproportionately affected by issues related to housing, employment, substance use disorder, mental illness, and chronic medical illness. The Reentry Welcome Centers will ensure that people are connected to these services on their day of their release, they will help people apply for public benefits, and provide continuing supports while people are already in the community.

From a fiscal perspective, SB 572 is a long-term investment in people and communities. When we invest in people returning home from prison everyone benefits. From a human perspective, SB 572 provides the opportunity to identify and create effective solutions to assist disproportionately affect communities of color.

Community Partners in Action currently operates the Hartford Reentry Welcome Center in partnership with the City of Hartford and our forty plus community partners. The agency received a 3-year grant from The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving to work directly with 150 individuals annually returning to their Greater Hartford Community. We opened the Center in September 2018 and to date have assisted over 700 individuals. Of these, one hundred forty people discharging from prison were transported directly to the Center by the CT Department of Correction for a “warm hand-off, half of whom came to us during COVID-19.

The Reentry Welcome Center, located at Hartford City Hall, is a place where people returning; home from prison can feel welcome and receive support. The Center provides care continuity; case management, information; referrals; basic needs and housing assistance; substance abuse/mental health/medical referrals; employment services; identification assistance; and so much more. Computers and telephone access is also available. Post COVID-19, the center has provided all individuals returning home with a cell phone, which provides essential connection to family, staff and necessary services.

Community Partners in Action is currently working with the City of Waterbury to open and operate a Reentry Welcome Center which will be modeled after our Center in Hartford. We hope to open in July 2021 at the Opportunities Industrialization Center (OIC) at 77 Bishop Street in Waterbury.

Thank you for time and careful consideration of SB 572.

Respectfully submitted,

Deborah L. Rogala, LCSW