



DATE: February 11, 2021

TO: Public Safety and Security Committee

FROM: Julia Wilcox, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy, The Alliance

RE: S.B. 572: An Act Concerning Community Crisis Response Teams and Reentry Centers

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

My name is Julia Wilcox, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy at the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance (The Alliance). The Alliance is the statewide organization representing the nonprofit sector. Community nonprofits provide essential services to over half a million individuals and families in Connecticut every year, and employ 14% of Connecticut's workforce, improving the quality of life in communities across the State.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of S.B. 572: An Act Concerning Community Crisis Response Teams and Reentry Centers. This bill seeks to establish programs to support alternative police response programs and provide greater support to individuals reentering the community from prison.

We commend the Committee for introducing this important legislation. As the state continues to pursue a more appropriate and effective way of addressing social justice and police reform – in keeping with the national movement, it is critical that we revisit the policies that have been less than effective in supporting improved outcomes for justice-involved individuals.

There are concrete and ongoing examples of the positive impact that both diversion and intervention services have on our communities, and the resulting reduction in the number of individuals unnecessarily entering our correctional system.

The services as proposed in S.B. 572 are an integral component of Connecticut's behavioral health continuum of care. Currently, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), provides mobile emergency crisis services to individuals age eighteen or older. There are 18 Mobile Crisis Teams (MCT) in our state, 8 DMHAS operated and 10 DMHAS funded, in partnership with the nonprofit community. In addition, DMHAS also funds Crisis Intervention Teams (CIT), a best practice designed to provide law enforcement with training on resources to connect persons in a mental health/substance use crisis to community supports and services. These services have been invaluable in terms of improving the options that are available both to law enforcement and the individuals in crisis. Passage of S.B. 572 would increase opportunities for the nonprofit provider community to partner with the state agencies and law enforcement, to improve outcomes.

The Greater Hartford Reentry Welcome Center is an extraordinary example of the difference that a supportive approach to reentry can have not only for the individuals and families involved, but the communities at large. In December 2017, the Hartford Foundation provided a three-year, \$450,000 grant to Community Partners in Action, in collaboration with other nonprofits and government partners, to launch the Greater Hartford Reentry Welcome Center. The City of Hartford committed in-kind resources, including

the Center's space in Hartford City Hall, and staff time to provide additional support. This public-private partnership has been working to change the course of the lives of men and women returning home from prison at the end of their sentences.

Community Justice providers support justice-involved individuals and their families, as well as survivors of crime. These programs, funded by the Department of Correction and the Court Support Services Division of the Judicial Branch, continue to play an essential role in the ongoing success related to criminal justice reform in Connecticut. Unfortunately, since 2007, community nonprofits have lost at least \$461 million in state funding that has not kept pace with inflation. At the same time, demand for community services continues to increaseⁱ.

According to the January 2021 OPM Monthly Indicators Reportⁱⁱ, community providers are serving approximately 4,000 people in programs which are funded by Department of Corrections – a greater than 30% increase from 2014. Thousands more receive services through providers that contract with the Court Support Services Division of Judicial Branch.

Over the past five years, while the prison population has fallen dramatically, demand for community services for people involved in the justice system has increased. While these demands have increased over time, funding for community justice programs has been cut by nearly 15%, or \$5.8 million (with no increase in the proposed budget for 2022-2023). Appropriately funding the programs as proposed in S.B. 572, would be a substantial investment in the communities of Connecticut.

Once again, The Alliance urges the committee to support S.B. 572, which will establish programs to support alternative police response programs and provide greater support to individuals reentering the community from prison. The ability of the state to ensure continuation of the criminal justice reforms that have positioned Connecticut as a national leader, is greatly dependent on a sustainable system of services, as provided by the nonprofit sector.

Thank you for your consideration of these important issues.

Julia Z. Wilcox, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy

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ⁱ White Paper of The Alliance: Increase Funding by \$461 Million for Community Nonprofits: <https://ctnonprofitalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/2021-White-Paper-Increase-Funding-by-461-Million.pdf>.

ⁱⁱ January 2021 OPM Monthly Indicators Report: https://portal.ct.gov/-/media/OPM/CJPPD/CjResearch/MonthlyIndicators/2021-MONTHLY-INDICATOR-REPORTS/MonthlyIndicatorsReport_Jan_-2021.pdf