

Appropriations Testimony: Ombusman

“Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France, and members of the Appropriations Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you tonight. My name is _Ann Massaro and I am a resident of ___North Haven , CT, and I am a member of the steering committee for Stop Solitary CT.”

Today I want to speak to the part of our Protect ACT that creates an office of corrections ombudsman. This office is absolutely necessary to balance the CT prison system. It is vital because of the nature of prison and the inadequacy of other means of dealing with the conflicts, grievance, and interpersonal problems inherent in incarceration. Without this office, there is a lack of oversight and transparency which means that people in prison are often overlooked, neglected, or can be placed in dangerous conditions.

The Ombudsperson’s role has a long and honorable tradition as a means of protesting against, bias, abuse, and other improper treatments or unfairness. For a model within the state of Connecticut, and what is envisioned for this Omsbud office, one just has to look at the Ombuds in the Office of Child Advocate The ombuds is an advocate for fairness and humane treatment of people who are incarcerated in Connecticut prisons.

Since the office is independent and external to the correctional facility and DOC, it ensures objectivity and credibility. Other states such as New Jersey, Delaware, and New York have an ombuds positions and have documented improved conditions for incarcerated people. NJ has documented that an ombuds can save taxpayers money by stopping abuse before it leads to a lawsuit. But in order to be effective this office must have teeth. This is why in the PROTECT ACT the ombuds will have the power to investigate the Department of Corrections, advocate for incarcerated people, and recommend systemic change.