

Appropriations Committee  
Friday, February 26

House Bill 6439: AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH, 2023, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR

Senator Ostern, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France, and members of the Appropriations:

My name is Jean-Claude Ambroise speaking to you from the "Submarine Capital of the World" Groton, CT. I am a state employee with the Connecticut Department of Correction teaching in Unified School District #1 as a Correctional Vocational Instructor for 16 years at York Correctional Institution; the only female state facility. I also serve as a P3B bargaining unit union steward since 2017. My testimony this evening is to respectfully request dedicating independent educational funding for Unified School District #1. This funding will provide fair and equitable treatment to all students who have a right to better themselves for the future. In the past decade, money allocated to state correctional education has decreased considerably. In order to give our returning citizens an increased chance of success upon re-entry, it is ALL of our professional, ethical, and moral obligations to improve our approach and better support a population who desperately needs it.

Working with the female population at YCI provides me background knowledge on educational inequities between male and female incarcerated individuals. Here is one glaring example I would like to share. A carpentry vocational program was added to the female facility in 2018. However in the past two years the department and school were unable to find finances to invest in the needed modifications to support the new carpentry vocational program, a trade identified as a non-traditional job for women. Now the class has been scuttled from YCI and moved to another male facility where a carpentry program already exists. We can all agree there is no educational equity or fairness in that. If there was a dedicated budget line item for school equipment and materials, which all state schools receive, the disenfranchisement of the female population would not be currently occurring.

This type of investment in education technology is desperately needed in our school district to better replicate the systems used in the current workforce. At the moment most computers used in the correctional classrooms are two operating systems behind the ones used by you or I this evening. Also, the need for internet access and investment into network integration is critical for educators to effectively incorporate modernized teaching tools and strategies teaching to increase student learning outcomes. These are basic requirements necessary in all 21st century classrooms.

The State of Connecticut's own research supports the investment into correctional education. Connecticut's own Mike Lawlor cited that for every \$1 dollar invested in prison education saves the state taxpayers \$5 in future incarceration costs. Also, further studies show that returning citizens that leave prison achieving a State HS Diploma or Vocational certificate increases the likelihood for finding gainful employment. This positive outcome then in turn reduces the recidivism rate significantly.

A few years ago, I had the privilege to meet with Representative Walker and her staff to discuss these very issues. It was a productive meeting that resulted in legislation to fund the school district independently. The certified teaching staff were appreciative of the legislature's support. Unfortunately, the budget item for correctional education investment was lined out by the Governor and we still need this funding. I come before you to once again ask for your support for correction education and our professional educators.

Please consider adding independent funding for Unified School District #1 as an annual budget line item in this legislative session. It is the technology investment and classroom support needed so our diverse population get the "second chance" they truly deserve. Thank you for your time.

Respectfully,

Jean-Claude Ambroise