

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 Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Mixer, Representative France, and members of the Appropriations:

My name is Roland Bishop, and I am the elected Secretary/Treasurer of CSEA SEIU Local 2001, a labor union representing approximately 25,000 active and retired public and private sector workers. I am also the elected president of the P3E bargaining unit council that represents state school teachers, vocational instructors, department heads and principals including 150 certified staff in the Department of Corrections. I work full time as a state school teacher at the Willard-Cybulski Correctional Institution, the department's reentry facility.

I come before you today to discuss the budget for the Department of Correction; specifically funding for educational and vocational programs delivered by the certified staff in the Unified School District #1 (USD #1)

The current incarcerated population is approximately 9,100, with a school enrollment (unduplicated) of 1,180. The historical data informs us that approximately 95% of the incarcerated population will eventually return to the community. This number drives the need for the continued success of pre-release academic education and vocational programs that feed responsible reentry programs. The success of pre-release education, what we do in (USD #1), is critical to continue to expand the pool of college candidates and candidates with employable and certified skills for reentry programming. Two examples, first, annually USD #1 has historically awarded more GED Diplomas than any other education system in Connecticut. Second, this year we sought to work with local trade unions to provide opportunities for apprenticeships for graduates of the Vocational Carpentry Program at York CI. Two women secured interviews for paid apprenticeships with the construction laborer's local. Think of the possibilities!

Currently USD #1 is not directly funded within the department's budget. Successes as noted here has been achieved through talent, entrepreneurship, grant and Title 1 funding. Nevertheless, we must bring all technology platforms to current standards, for example students working to achieve a Microsoft Specialist Certification are using lower versions of Windows and Office, some released over 10 years ago. Vocational programming such as Drafting CAD/CAM, Commercial Cleaning, Machine Tool and Carpentry, providing skills needed in the current marketplace, require resources to remain current and operate safely.

Support for reentry alone is not enough; it has to be coupled with pre-release academic and vocational education. An investment in a robust pre-release education provided by USD #1, strategically partnered with reentry programming increases the capacity for successful, responsible transition to the community.

The staff of USD #1 believe we have provided a model that is the vehicle you seek for reform – as always it is education.

I want to thank the committee for your time this evening, and I would be more than happy to answer any questions that you may have.

Roland Bishop