

February 25, 2021

Good evening Appropriations Chair and other distinguished members of the Committee. My name is Barbara Fair and I am an organizer for Stop Solitary CT, founder of My Brother's Keeper and a devoted West Haven voter. Thank you for the opportunity to come before you to urge you to invest in the lives of some of the most vulnerable people in our state, those held in state custody. Incarceration is about losing one's liberty. It should not be about people needlessly losing their lives.

So much money in Connecticut is spent providing a high quality of life for one sector of our society while it diminishes the quality of life for others. I have seen the Correctional budget rise from \$168,000,000 in 1968 to over \$700,000,000 by 2008. Corrections has moved from rehabilitation toward a cheap labor force and containment.

Noone seemed to question why over \$17 million was spent to operate Northern supermax which held 50 people with staff of over 200 to supervise them. People who spent 23-24 hours a day on lockdown. Several other facilities also have a large staff to supervise men who are locked down over 20 hours a day. Why has no-one questioned why In 2020 DOC paid out 78 million dollars in overtime alone? Where is the fiscal responsibility in that?

Overcriminalization of poor communities cost taxpayers billions and in human capital which we can never calculate. Almost half of the money spent on running these facilities goes toward paying staff. Correctional, like police have lots of political influence. Many times, that influence prevents reform from occurring. That same influence protects DOC jobs even as the prison population dwindles. Incarcerated people need influence as well which is why Stop Solitary Ct urges this Committee to fund the reinstatement of independent oversight as one of our listed demands within the Protect Act. Oversight is needed to sustain and save the lives of this vulnerable population.

From 2001 until 2018 UCONN granted a no-bid contract paying \$140 million annually. Care was deemed substandard yet year after year, due to lack of external oversight the quality of medical and mental health dwindled while UCONN got paid. In 2016 DOC flagged 25 medical cases that went wrong, resulting in the death of 8 people.

One of those people was 19-year-old Karon Nealy Jr, serving a 2-year sentence complained of sore throat, hair loss, rash, loss of appetite, intense joint pain and fatigue. He was seen by doctors ten times and treated with Motrin. Within 10 months of incarceration, he was dead, from total organ failure, and lung infection just months before going home. The state had to pay out a lawsuit.

Another was 19 year old Tatiana Laboy who gave birth in the toilet in her locked cell because her cries for help were ignored. Again, the state paid out a lawsuit. These are just 2 of many lawsuits the state has had to pay out for medical and mental health neglect and countless incidents physical and psychological abuse. Had external oversight been in place lives as well as multi millions could have been saved.

Correctional positions rose from 1,557 in 1969 to over 7,000 in 2002. Currently staff stands at 6,117 even as prison population fell to a low of 9,945 in 2020. The department clearly does not require over 6,000 staff to supervise 9,945 people, especially when a huge number of incarcerated are in lockdown over 21 hrs a day. It makes perfect sense for the department to call a moratorium on hiring. A reduction in their budget might move them toward fiscal responsibility. I urge you to make decisions to save money and to save lives. Thank you for your time and attention to those who need it the most.

