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**Governor's Proposed Budget FY2021-23 Appropriations Hearing
HB 6439 AAC the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June 30th, 2023
Judicial and Correction Budgets
Friday, February 26th, 2021**

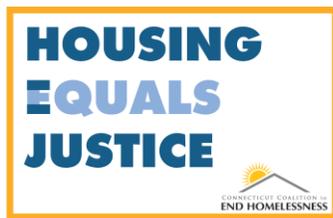
Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee, thank you for allowing to testify. My name is Sarah Fox and I am the Director of Policy at the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness. I speak today representing a broad coalition of more than 100 organizations across Connecticut who are all committed to a common goal of achieving an end to homelessness in Connecticut. Our coalition includes non-profit providers of homeless services, as well as housing agencies, private sector businesses, and concerned citizens.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on **H.B. 6439 An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023 And Making Appropriations Therefor**. I am here to testify on investments needed within the Department of Correction and Judicial Department to address a major public safety crisis in our state: homelessness and housing stability among people involved in the criminal justice system.

Criminal justice involvement among our state's homeless population is costly and disruptive. While homelessness is a tragedy for anyone who experiences it, it brings additional challenges for people involved in the criminal justice system. Today, we must recognize that the same obstacles that make it hard for people returning home to our communities to succeed — homelessness, barriers to healthcare, lack of employment, and a lack of transportation, also make it more difficult to stay safe from coronavirus.

CCEH has been deeply concerned about the large number of people who experience homelessness who also have been incarcerated. Data analysis shows that people who were homeless at the time of incarceration or detention are being discharged right back into homelessness after prison or jail, people are also newly becoming homeless after release from prison, and that people who are homeless wind up spending more time in prison than people with the same sentence who have housing, maxing out their sentences, being released at End-Of-Sentence and then being discharged to homelessness. Homeless people released on probation or parole supervision are also at greater risk of getting sent back to prison for technical violations and or revocations.

In 2019, CCEH partnered with the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) and the Department of Correction (DOC) to conduct a cross-system data match aimed at investigating the connection between the criminal justice system and homelessness in Connecticut. CCEH furnished the Office of Policy and Management with a three-year data set (January 1, 2016 through January 1, 2019) retrieved from the Connecticut Homelessness Information System (CT HMIS) after securing a data match agreement to cross match with the state's criminal justice databases. OPM matched and identified individuals based on common identifiers such as First Name, Last Name, Date of Birth, Gender, and Race. CCEH then analyzed the results of the OPM match to



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further refine data about those who were experiencing homelessness either before or after DOC involvement.

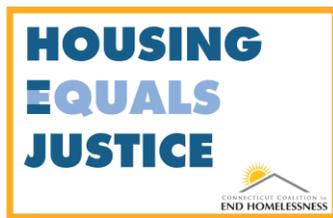
The results of the data match were stark and revealed the inextricable link between homelessness and incarceration in Connecticut. The match included 17,226 individuals were served across the various emergency shelters in Connecticut from January 1, 2016 through January 1, 2019 matched to the approximately 450,000 individuals were admitted to the Connecticut Department of Corrections within the same period.

I have included charts and graphs in Appendix A which help to illuminate the results of the data match. Here is a quick snapshot of important takeaways:

- The cross-system data match revealed that 8,187 (48%) of those who used the shelters between 2016 through 2019 also had a DOC record, and that 3,562 (21%) of the matched individuals were released from the DOC within same time frame. On an annual basis, nearly 1,200 people who slept in a homeless shelter were released from a DOC facility within the last three years.
- Roughly half of all matched individuals were most recently released from DOC after pretrial detention, half for sentences.
- Of those released after pretrial detention, the majority did not make bail and were released from courts. Of those sentenced, 80% were released at end-of-sentence.
- For many of these individuals, the release from DOC to homelessness was not a new occurrence: the majority (69%) of these individuals had experienced homelessness prior to their most recent release from DOC.
- Many of these individuals appear to be caught on a decades-long revolving door between homelessness and incarceration as 54% of these individuals have had more than six admissions to DOC, and 57% began their involvement with DOC in adolescence though they are now in their 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s.
- The highest number of matched individuals were in Hartford (26%), followed by New Haven (19%), followed by New London, Waterbury, and Stamford.

The analysis has revealed that the lack of stable housing also leads people to spend longer stays in prison beyond their eligible release dates. Data has shown that many of the people who experienced homelessness following DOC release were released on an End-of-Sentence status. While the State's policy is to release most inmates to the community when they have completed at least 50% of their sentences, when inmates lack stable housing or an approved sponsor, they are overlooked for early release and held in prison longer. When this lack of housing is not resolved, inmates will wind up spending their entire sentence in prison and are then released without any supervision. The fact that 80% of sentenced inmates who experienced homelessness following DOC release were released at End-of-Sentence indicates that people who lack stable housing are forced to have longer stays in prison than people who do have housing or sponsors. In other words, homelessness results in longer incarceration stays, higher rates of recidivism, and negative criminal justice and human outcomes.

Leaders at the Department of Correction have identified the lack of stable housing for inmates



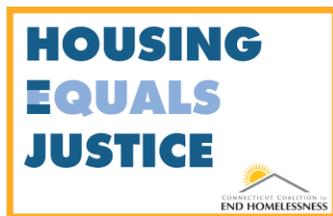
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following release as one of their top challenges. DOC currently has a limited set of tools to address the lack of stable housing, namely, by utilizing their network of contracted halfway houses. However, halfway houses were not designed to address long-term housing needs and so inmates in halfway houses wind up staying longer than intended and many may fall into homelessness after a halfway house stay. Beyond halfway houses, DOC has also attempted to tap into homelessness and housing assistance provided by the state's Coordinated Access Network system. However, with the CAN system already overburdened with demand for assistance, people discharged from DOC wind up stuck in shelters, placed on housing waiting lists, and many wind up back behind bars again before a program opening is available.

Recognizing that successful reintegration is contingent upon an individual's ability to secure safe and stable housing, leaders at the Court Support Services Division (CSSD) of the Judicial Branch recently began systematically screening and tracking probationers' housing status in order to more consistently help probationers resolve their homelessness. CCEH has also recently partnered with OPM and DOC to build the Department of Correction Re-Entry Housing Assistance Program to meet the needs of those who are End of Sentence (EOS) exiting the Department of Correction who have been determined to have no housing upon discharge. This population is typically an underserved population who has had a history of homelessness and most likely has been frequent utilizers of state services. As with the overall population of incarcerated individuals, ethnic and racial minorities within the state disproportionately represent this population. While this program began during the Covid-19 pandemic and has only been in existence since April 1, 2020; the team of homeless service providers, re-entry providers, DOC discharge planners and re-entry staff has been remarkable. Over 121 EOS individuals have already been referred to the new system and are being assisted to move people to housing solutions pre-release or as soon as possible thereafter. While the program is still being refined, the systems that have been developed and partnerships formed have shown great promise.

In closing, we commend Governor Lamont for the closure of Northern Correctional Facility and the plans to close other Connecticut prisons and strongly believe that this depopulation is long overdue and critical to the health and safety on both sides of the walls. Funds saved by these closures must be reinvested into the people harmed by the criminal legal system via resources such as housing, expanding medical and behavioral health services in the community, and the creation of a 24/7 mobile crisis unit to respond to people in mental health crisis so they can avoid criminalization and incarceration in the first place. CCEH, in partnership with ALCU-CT, SEIU 1199, and the Yale Transitions Clinic are asking that savings from the closure of Northern and other units and facilities of \$20 million in FY2022 and \$46.9 million in 2023 be reinvested into reentry assistance programs like:

- **Creation of a 'reentry housing assistance' line item within the Department of Correction** budget and reallocate no less than \$2 million annually to contract with community-based organizations to provide housing-related case management, housing search and navigation, temporary rental assistance, and other basic needs for any inmate assessed as needing reentry housing assistance.
- **Expand Reentry Services within the Department of Correction budget and**



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reallocate \$5 million annually to a new line item for this office. \$3 million will be used to contract with community-based organizations to hire community health workers, while \$2 million will be used to hire reentry healthcare workers, employed by DOC.

- **Reallocate an additional \$4 million to the Forensic Services line item** within the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to fund new reentry case management social worker positions within all state operated Local Mental Health Authorities (LMHAs) and expand the capacity of DMHAS-operated sites for the Advanced Supervision Intervention & Support Team (ASIST) program.
- **Reallocate and additional \$4 million to Personal Services line item** within the Department of Public Health to hire and train 50 formerly incarcerated community health workers to be embedded in community health centers statewide.

We also urge you to support the **Alliance for Nonprofits request to increase funding by \$461 million over** the next five years to housing and homeless service providers along with other providers across the state's service-delivery system.

Thank you to the committee for the opportunity to present this testimony, and for your hard work making important and life-saving decisions during this public health crisis – it is with your support that we can help make sure Connecticut's residents are healthy and stably housed.

Sincerely,

Sarah Fox
Director of Policy
CT Coalition to End Homelessness

Appendix A: Data Match and Analysis

In March 2019, the Connecticut Coalition to End Homeless (CCEH) furnished the Office of Policy and Management with 3 year data (Jan 1, 2016 to Jan 1, 2019) retrieved from the Homeless Management Information System to cross match with the state’s criminal justice databases.

Key Findings



17,226 persons within CT HMIS



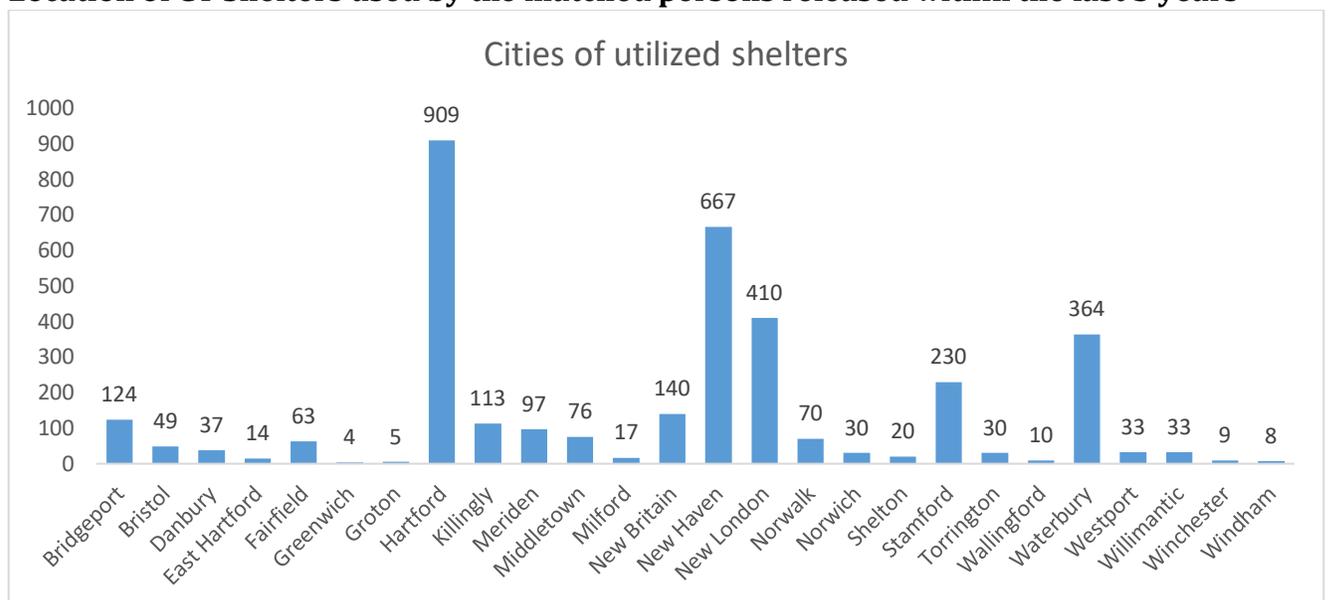
450,000 persons admitted to Connecticut DOC



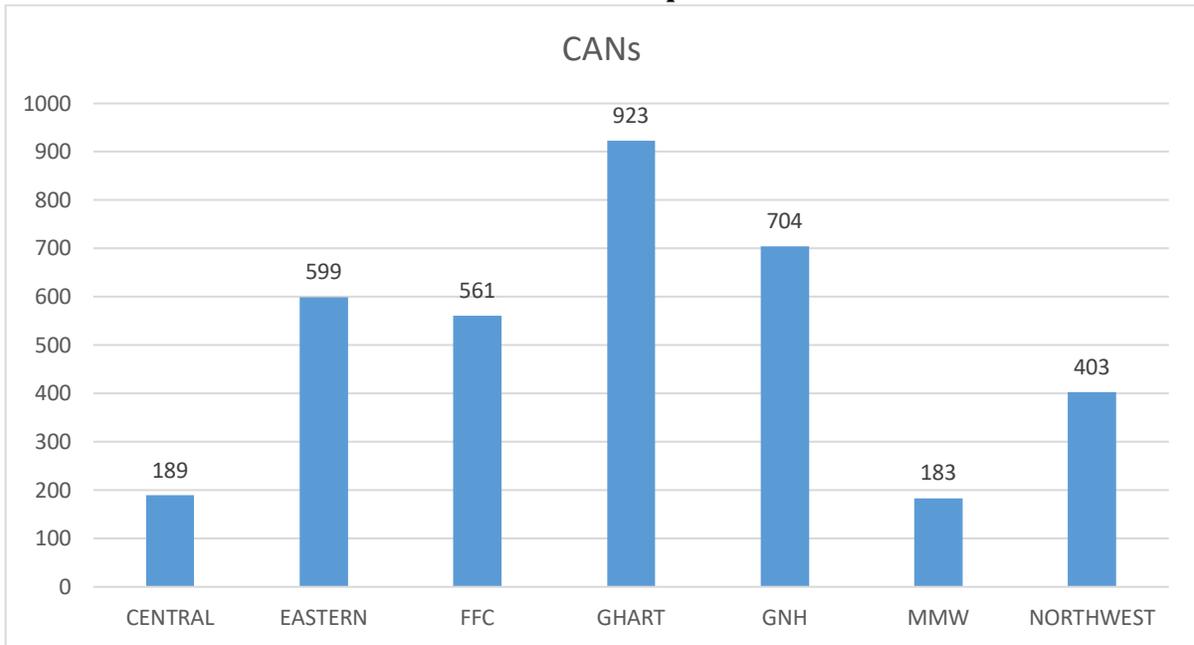
8,187(48%) of persons who used the shelters between 2016 to 2019 had a DOC record

3,562 (21%) of persons who used the shelters within 2016 to 2019 were also released from DOC within same time frame

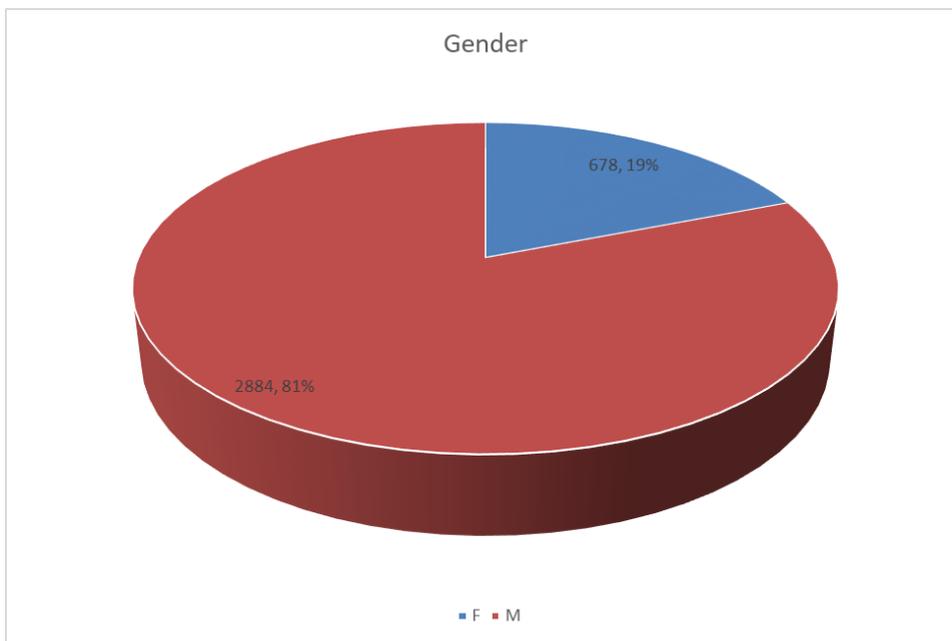
Location of CT Shelters used by the matched persons released within the last 3 years



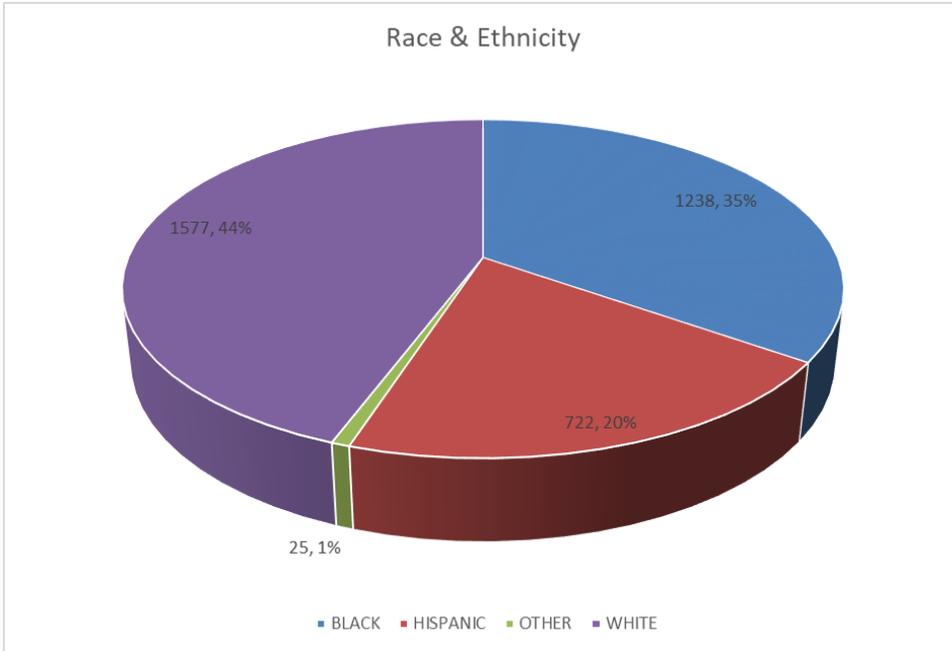
909 (26%) persons used shelters in Hartford while 667(19%) used shelters in New Haven
Coordinated Assess Network where matched persons were served



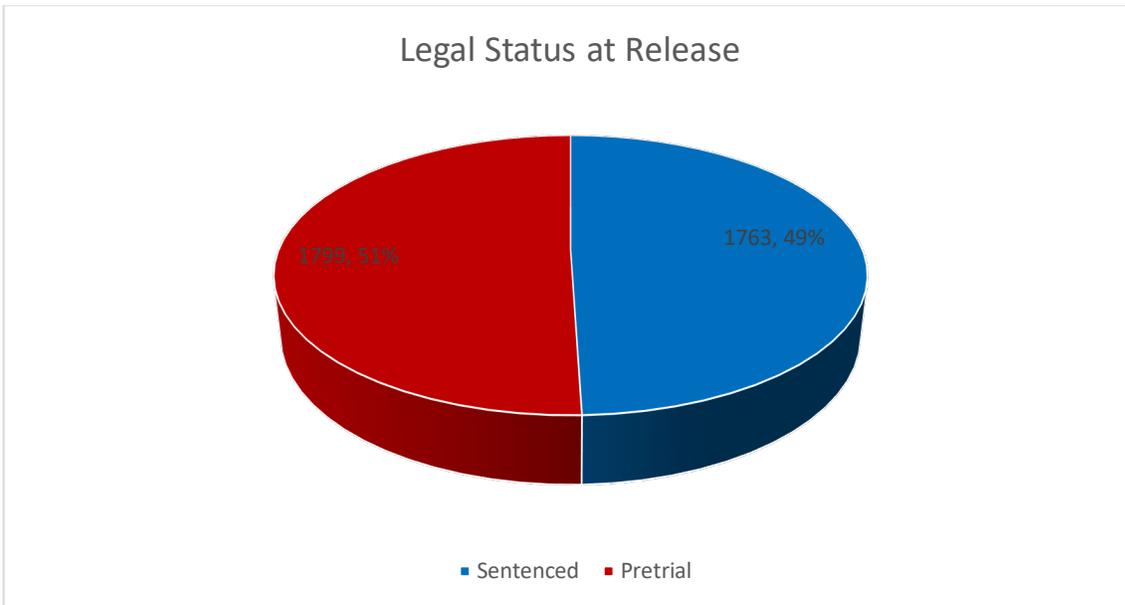
923(26%) were served at the Greater Hartford CAN while 704(20%) were served at the New Haven CAN.



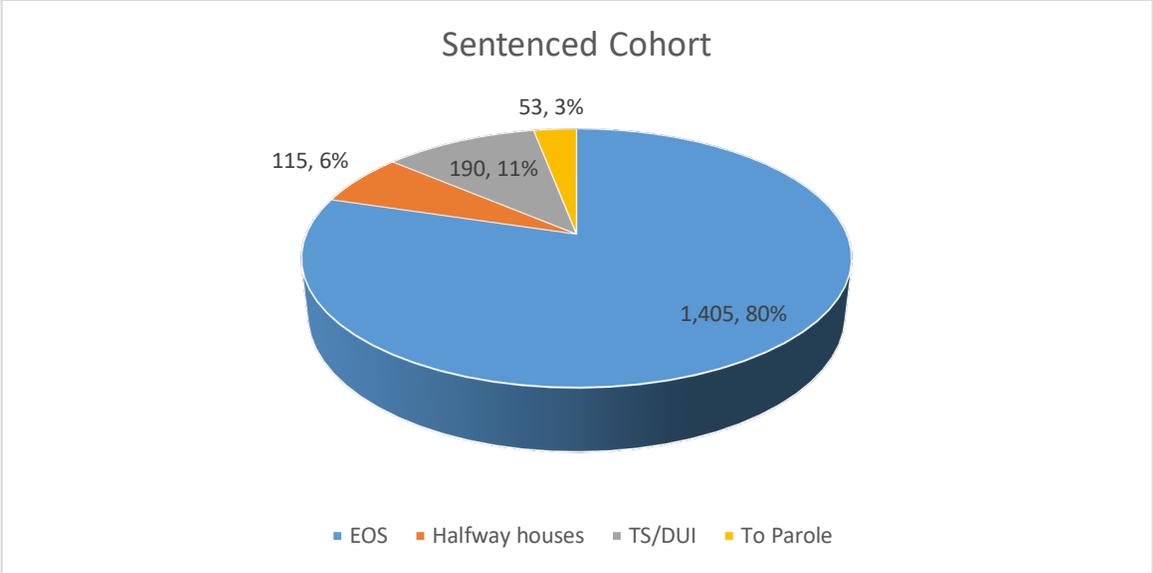
The cross match indicate that more men 2,884(81%) were released within last 3 years than 678(19%) women



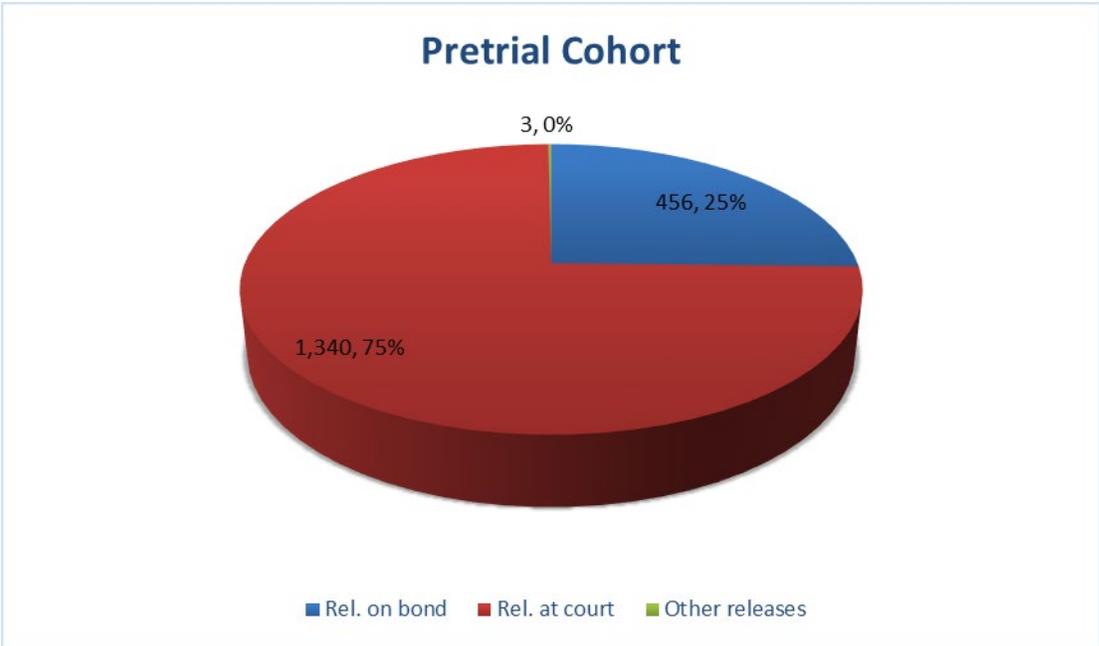
An almost even split among the white and non- white population



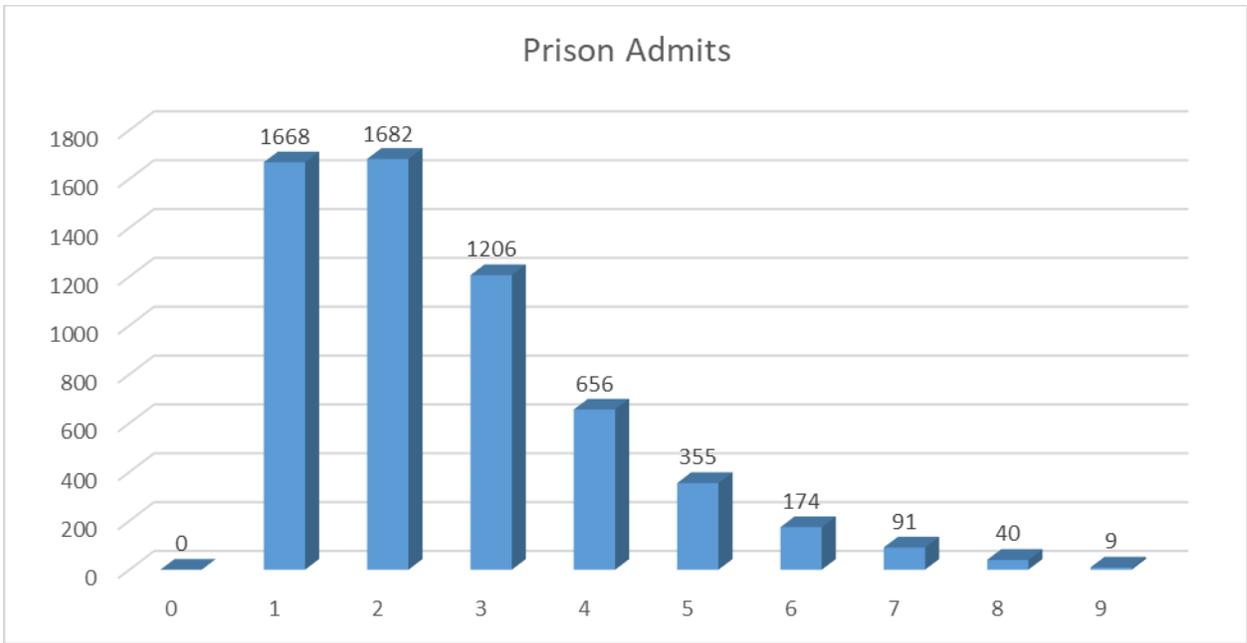
An even split between the Sentenced and Pre-trial population



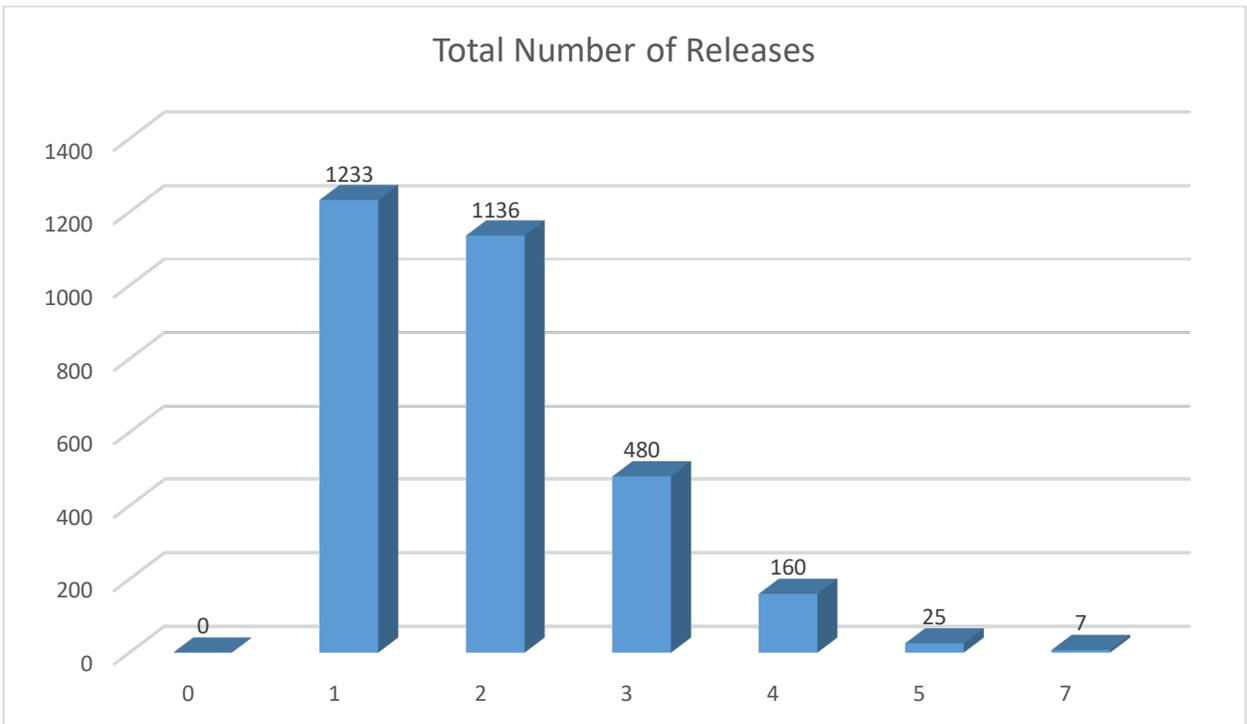
Among those sentenced, 1,405 (80%) were released at the End of sentence within the 3 years in view.



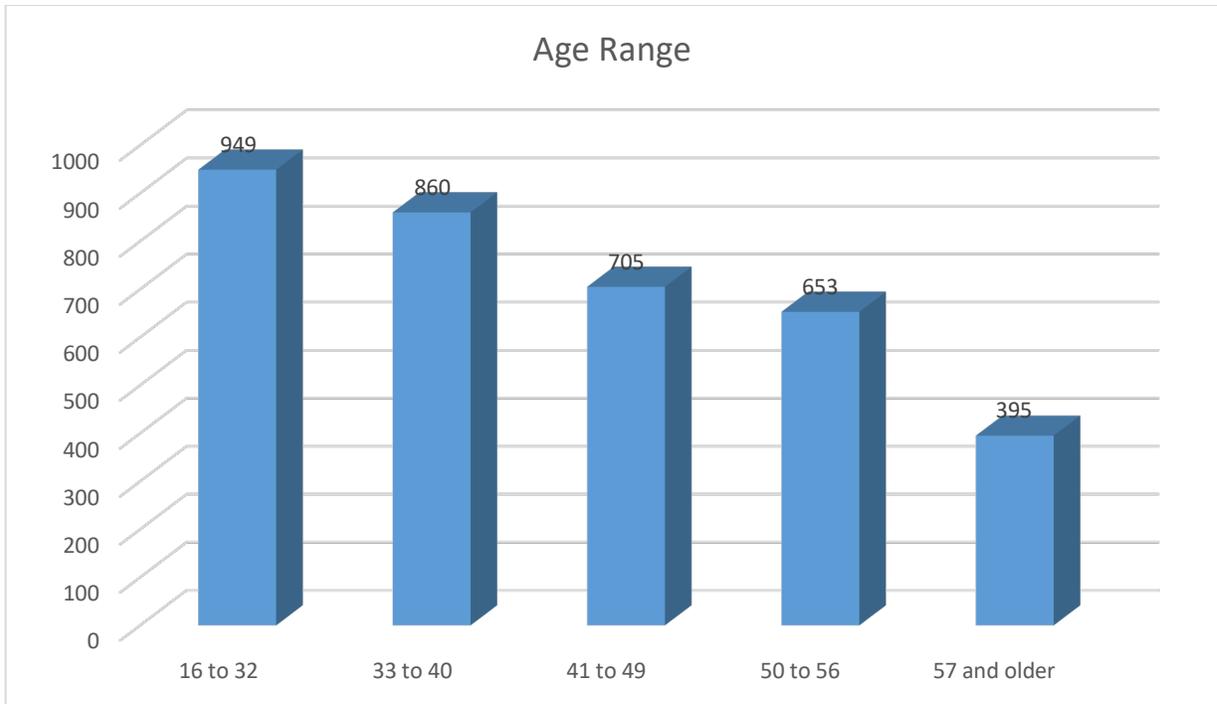
Among the Pretrial Cohort, 1,340(75%) were released at court after being detained within the period in view.



For the period under review, most of the identified individuals were arrested about 1- 3 times.

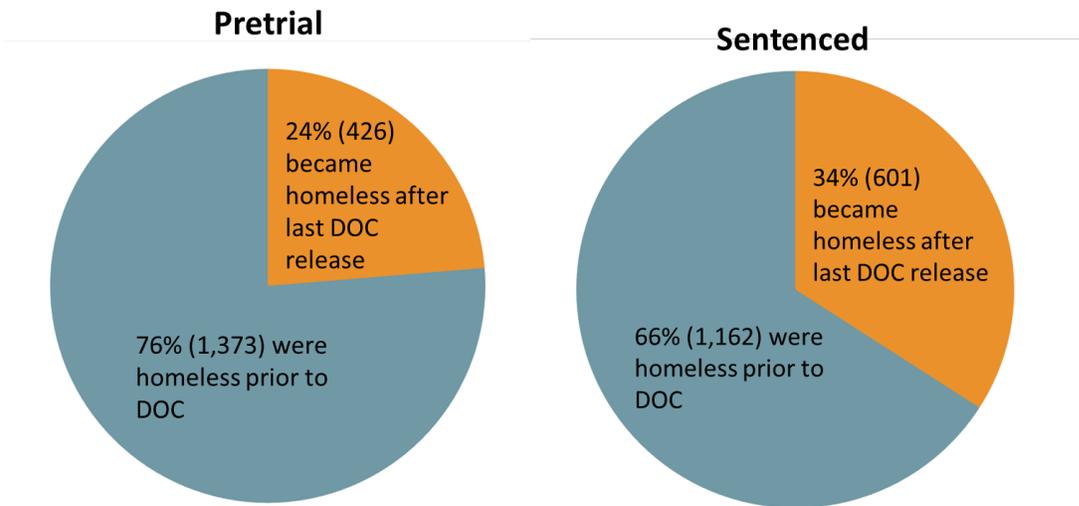


More people got released in recent years, the cohorts were released/ discharged about 1 or 2 times within 3 years.



Over 50% of the identified population are within the age range 16 – 40 years. While 217(6%) of these population are young adults.

Housing status of identified population in the cross match.



Indicates that over 50% of identified individuals were homeless before interaction with the DOC. Among the sentenced are 53(3%) parolees who were mostly identified as being homeless within the CT criminal justice system.