

FOR TESTIMONY ON FRIDAY FEBRUARY 26

Good evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Miner, Representative France, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Robert J. Gillis and I am a resident of New Haven, CT. I am a Steering Committee member of Stop Solitary CT and I thank you for the opportunity to present today. I will be offering comments on the Governor's Budget for the Department of Correction, with specific reference to a bill we are supporting before the Judiciary Committee called the PROTECT ACT.

I would preface my remarks by noting that I retired from the Department of Correction after a 36-year career, 18 years of which were at the level of Warden in three different facilities. Our committee consists of individuals of varying backgrounds and experiences who have joined forces to eliminate the use of solitary confinement in our state. Yesterday, we released a document titled *Protecting Lives, Saving Dollars* which lays out our projection of the savings which would follow the elimination of isolated institutional housing (i.e. solitary confinement.). Without going into major detail, we believe that approximately 17 million dollars would be saved through the reduction of direct and ancillary expenses caused by the maintenance of isolated housing.

The question should arise: "If you purport to a savings, why come to this committee which has the task of deciding where state revenues should be allocated?" My answer is simple and straightforward: **Money is the implementation of policy.**

We believe that the **policy** which we are advancing improves the quality of institutional life for those who are incarcerated by:

- Limiting the number of hours per day when an incarcerated person is held locked in a cell; limiting also the number of consecutive days of such confinement;
- Establishing rational and humane restrictions on what are called "in cell restraints."
- Encouraging the continuation of social connections with family and close friends through face-to-face visiting, written correspondence, and cost-free telephone calling;
- Developing reliable and more accurate compilation of data concerning restrictive placements;
- Establishment of oversight through the securing of an ombuds function;

Connecticut did have an ombuds office a number of years in the past, but funds were cut because the project was regarded as redundant to existing agency-driven "administrative remedies" which were viewed as being sufficient to resolve the concerns of aggrieved parties. We are, in fact, one of very few states which have no established office, board, or committee established to evaluate the operation or effectiveness of its corrections activities.

- The extension of workers compensation for correctional employees deemed to be affected by PTSD; We also support the development of employee wellness programs designed to reduce the stress of working in the correctional environment.

We estimate that the costs of the ombuds function, the employee wellness options, and the maintenance of social relationships will be outweighed by the savings. Northern CI will be closed, and we are NOT including those savings in our calculations.

But there is much more that can be done, if our **policy** is implemented by increased funding.

The Governor's budget redirects the Northern savings to the general fund. Our position is that the Northern reductions should be directed to:

- Enhanced educational and vocational programming at the institutional level. Common operating practice has always observed that inmate idleness is the primary cause for mal-adjustment—a factor especially important when the often-applied remedy to reduce unacceptable behavior is punitive restriction. The reduction in idleness also makes the job of correctional personnel more conducive to productive, less stressful conditions.
- Provision of pro-social therapeutic programs, such as cognitive behavioral therapy, which is evidence-based, proven to be effective, and can be conducted by line-level staff after completion of a modicum of hands-on training.
- Establishing mental illness interventions which are productive to treatment and which rely less on mere containment and control.
- Funding community-based programs at higher levels to effectively buttress existing re-entry efforts.

In short, we are into the third decade of this century. The term “correction” was developed on a widespread basis in the 1960's. We have come to realize that the system needs “correction” if it can be redeemed to accomplish anything worthwhile. Remember: at least 90 percent of those incarcerated are ultimately released. Their experiences should reflect the latest developments in social reintegration, and not the obsolete practices of sixty some years in the past.