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United for Quality Care

February 26, 2021  
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Before the Appropriations Committee

Good Evening Senator Osten, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Jamie Loehfelm and I am a Licensed Professional Counselor at Bridgeport Correctional Center. I have done this work for 13 years and I absolutely love being able to provide mental health treatment to our offender population as I am very rewarded in knowing that I am not only providing treatment to our most vulnerable population but I am also impacting and improving public safety for our communities here in Connecticut.

I am testifying today to urge the committee to reject the \$1.3 million in cuts that the Governor has proposed to Inmate Medical Services in the DOC budget. Instead, this Committee should make a *real investment* of \$15M in DOC Health Services to expand preventative care for inmates, create a safer environment for staff, and produce healthier communities for all of us.

The Governor's proposed cuts negatively impact our patients by delaying the timeliness of care and not allowing patients to be seen on a regular basis. It means inmates waiting 6 months to see a doctor, only for their sicknesses to become more emergent, painful, and expensive. We strive to provide a community standard of care at the CT DOC facilities. Patients who are incarcerated deserve the same quality of care that they can receive from their community providers. By cutting \$1.3M and not investing \$15M in funding to allow us to be fully staffed we are not able to provide the quality and standard of care that we want to provide to this population.

Currently, our staffing is already in crisis. We are so short-staffed that our patients risk not being seen and treated in a timely manner. This is a huge problem for safe and efficient patient care. The longer a patient has to wait the more acute the illness can be. We work in a dangerous environment with many risk factors. Being understaffed puts both patient and employees at risk. We also provide treatment to our offender population in an effort to help rehabilitate people in hopes of them releasing to society safely. These clients need and deserve a chance and the public needs and deserves the confidence of safety that is more likely to occur when people are able to get the mental health and substance abuse treatment that they so desperately need. We need our budget to reflect the staffing levels that we need to produce quality community standard care in a timely manner. Facilities need to have licensed mental health clinicians on both first and second

shift that meet the state mandatory minimum staffing levels. Our patients deserve nothing less than quality care.

I urge you to disregard the cuts requested in the Governor's budget and work with us going forward to find a way to help us provide the best care to our families. Thank you for your time.