



Legislative Testimony
765 Asylum Avenue, First Floor
Hartford, CT 06105
860-523-9146
www.acluct.org

Written Testimony on House Bill 6439, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023, and Making Appropriations Therefor

Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Ranking Member Miner, Ranking Member France, and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Kelly McConney Moore, and I am the interim senior policy counsel for the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut (ACLU-CT). I am here to testify on some of the appropriations set forth in House Bill 6439, An Act Concerning the State Budget for the Biennium Ending June Thirtieth, 2023, and Making Appropriations Therefor.

The ACLU-CT is an organization dedicated to ending mass incarceration and the disparate effects of mass incarceration on Black and brown Connecticut residents. One of the best uses of funds in Connecticut is to divest from policing and incarceration and reallocate those funds back into people and communities harmed by the systemically racist institutions of policing and mass incarceration. Even in instances where divestment is not available, investing money from the budget into reducing harmful policing and ending mass incarceration are among the best uses of funds for Connecticut. Some of the appropriations in the budget align with these values, but additional reallocations should be made as well.

The Governor has committed to closing Northern Correctional Institution (Northern) by the summer of 2021, saving approximately \$12.6 million in annual operating costs. The Governor's budget reallocates that money into a poorly defined "CREATES" fund which appears to be used to close the tax gap and other general fund purposes. Northern is a prison that has perpetrated great harm to the people

who have been incarcerated there, and indeed all incarcerated people, since it opened in 1995. The money saved from closing it should not be directed at potholes and pensions, but instead should be reallocated into tangible benefits for people caught up in the criminal legal system. These benefits include improved access to healthcare and better-funded healthcare services, both mental and physical, for people inside Department of Correction (DOC) custody and for people reentering their communities. Inside, the money would go to fund reentry healthcare workers inside DOC. For reentering people, the healthcare money would fund community health workers to be embedded in community health centers statewide. Reentry should also receive a portion of the money reallocated away from Northern, by expanding reentry services within the DOC budget via reentry case management social workers and reentry housing assistance, including case management, housing search, temporary rental assistance, and more. Money from Northern should also be reallocated to ensure that no person will enter incarceration just because they are in mental health crisis, by funding the state's mobile crisis intervention services to be available around the clock and across the state. Finally, the money from Northern should go directly to the dignity of people who have left incarceration, by funding technology supporting automatic record expungement for people who qualify. Reallocating money from the state's sole supermax prison and into remedying harms of the criminal legal system is a more just and moral use of these funds than plugging holes in the budget, as the Governor suggests.

The Governor's budget appropriates several line items which we support. First, the Office of the Inspector General is fully staffed with 9 positions. This independent office within the Division of Criminal Justice was created in 2020 to investigate police and hold them accountable when they hurt or kill people in Connecticut. The funding allocated to this office is a critical way for the legislature to demonstrate that it believes that no one should ever be killed at the hands of police. This allocation is both important and sufficient. We support it fully.

The funding to comply with prosecutorial transparency is also important. Prosecutors are some of the biggest drivers of mass incarceration, but they are largely insulated from accountability, in part because very little data about their work is publicly available. The funding from this line item reverses that trend, ensuring that the public can monitor the work of unelected state's attorneys and their judicial districts.

Finally, the Governor's budget allocates funding to support the creation of an automated criminal record erasure process, funded by the IT Capital Investment Program bond package. This funding is critical. People living with criminal records in Connecticut face over 550 barriers to full civil participation in our society. By allowing people who were once incarcerated a light at the end of the tunnel, Connecticut can demonstrate its belief in redemption and commitment to ensuring that no one serves a life sentence outside of prison that they were never sentenced to.

The ACLU-CT urges this Committee to reinvest the money saved from closing Northern Correctional Institution into healthcare services for incarcerated and reentering people, into mobile crisis units that serve as an alternative to police intervention, into ensuring housing for people leaving detention, and into IT improvements to establish a process of automatic criminal record erasure. We also urge this Committee to prioritize the existing appropriations in the budget for the Office of Inspector General, record erasure IT, and prosecutorial transparency, and more.