

February 23, 2021

Appropriations Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 2700
Hartford, CT 06106

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee,

This Friday, February 26, 2021, three EMERGE Connecticut, Inc. staff—Alden Woodcock, Reinaldo Cruz, and Richard Watkins—will be testifying to tell you about their exceptional re-entry program in New Haven, CT and why it deserves your support. As a member the Board of Directors at EMERGE, I am writing to urge you to approve their request for *continued and increased funding* of this uniquely successful program.

EMERGE's re-entry model has proven successful in New Haven since its founding in July 2011. Only 12% of EMERGE crewmembers are reincarcerated within two years of release, compared to Connecticut's 47%.¹ 70% of EMERGE crewmembers exit to employment or education, with 73% still working one year later. These results are possible because EMERGE—as a self-sufficient social enterprise and nonprofit—*works alongside formerly incarcerated individuals* seeking a supportive and healthy transition home from incarceration through paid employment, training, academic tutoring, counseling, peer-mentorship, coaching, and other trauma-informed services. Peer mentors and work site supervisors with direct experience in the criminal justice system hired from within EMERGE cohorts are an essential part of its success.

Through the requested renewal of \$150,000/year from the Dept. of Corrections (DOC) and an additional \$150,000/year from the Judicial Branch - Court Support Services Division (CSSD) for this budget cycle, *EMERGE will grow to meet three crucial goals:*

- Expand services from 25 people on parole annually to an additional 25 people on probation, through CSSD funds and increased staffing
- Meet the vested interest of New Haven Mayor Justin Elicker in growing EMERGE by securing increased number of city construction contracts, through supporting and training a larger EMERGE workforce
- Create career pathways to long-term stable employment via the growing demand from local unions (carpentry, bricklaying, etc.) for more people of color and for which EMERGE has a proven track record in successful placement

The additional \$150,000/year from CSSD is critical as EMERGE locates it work in the broader effort to end mass incarceration and its inequitable toll on Black and brown communities in Connecticut. According to the Prison Policy Initiative, the majority of people under carceral supervision in Connecticut are on probation—41,000 people to be specific as of 2016. (In comparison, 3,200 people were on parole) The need for supportive services directed toward Connecticut's probation population is urgently necessary. We affirm that EMERGE has the program model, the vision, and results to support these additional people on probation in their successful journeys back to their families and communities.

¹ Based on Connecticut DOC's 2008 cohort report.

This is also a cost-effective investment. EMERGE's average cost per participant is **\$7,315**; whereas the state's average annual cost per inmate is **\$62,149**, an over eight-fold cost to taxpayers and the state. According to an impact study conducted by the Yale UP Fund, a total grant of \$300,000 from DOC and CSSD combined to EMERGE would be equivalent to providing \$540,000 - \$750,000 directly to the population. The Appropriations Committee will be investing in a re-entry organization that knows how to make the most of every dollar toward its mission of supporting formerly incarcerated people.

As we look ahead—still situated in the midst of a pandemic and economic recession, as well as prison closures—EMERGE's trauma-informed and community-centered approach to re-entry will be a crucial pipeline for an increasing number of people returning home from incarceration and looking for stable employment and healing. Now is the time to invest in EMERGE and to help us meet our goals. Again, we urge you to support EMERGE's request this coming Friday.

Sincerely,

Brent Peterkin
Board Member