



Appropriations Committee Public Hearing Testimony for FY '22 and '23 - February 26, 2021

Good evening, Chairman Walker, Chairman Osten and Members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Collin Provost, President of Council 4 AFSCME Local 391. I am also speaking for Sean Howard, President of Local 387 and Mike Vargo, President of Local 1565.

We believe that it is ill-advised to close Northern Correctional Institution. There has been much over the top hyperbole about Northern. Our members have operated Northern professionally. It has served as an administrative segregation facility not a solitary confinement facility. Connecticut has not used solitary confinement for decades. Unfortunately, there is a need for an administrative segregation facility to protect inmates and staff from inmates who assault inmates and staff. There are very few inmates in administrative segregation relative to the whole of the inmate population.

Front-line corrections staff are concerned that closing state prisons will prove to be penny-wise and pound-foolish. Shoe-horning inmates into fewer facilities will undermine safety and security in the prisons and create more difficult conditions for offenders and staff. We're concerned that closing Northern will cause overcrowding, lead to more positive COVID-19 test results and limit the Agency's ability to quarantine. The State and the DOC should think about repurposing Northern instead of shuttering it.

If Northern and other facilities are to close, we urge that remaining facilities not be overcrowded. We have seen this happen in the past, where a prison shuts and inmates are crammed into remaining prison to the point of using temporary beds on gym floors.

We also urge that a portion of the \$12 million in savings anticipated by facility closing be used to train correctional staff. For decades, correctional staff used to receive 40 hours of annual training. Training ranged from proper use of force, to life saving, to how to deal with mentally stressed inmates and the like. We seem to have entered a new

era when how to deal with a pandemic is valuable course material for staff. This training is vital. In the long run this training saves wear and tear on staff and inmates. It saves taxpayer dollars in the long run. It is also needed to adequately teach staff how to deal with the changes in the law that were made in July in the police accountability bill.

We also urge that the General Assembly provide Covid hazardous duty pay to our members. About 25% of correctional staff have been diagnosed with Covid. Many have brought this dread disease back to their families. Many staff are suffering the long-term health damage wrought by Covid. Council 4 urges you to restore taxes on the richest of our citizens and go back to a tax system similar to that which made our country prosper through the fifties, sixties and seventies.