

**Appropriations Committee  
February 26, 2021  
Testimony of  
Angel Quiros, Commissioner  
Department of Correction**

Good afternoon Senator Osten, Representative Walker, Senator Winfield, Representative Candelaria and members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Angel Quiros, Commissioner of the Department of Correction.

This is my first budget hearing as Commissioner and I thank you for the opportunity to come before you today to discuss the Governor's proposed budget for the Department of Correction. The Governor's budget proposal for the Department will be challenging but manageable. I am confident that with the support of the Governor, the Legislature, the Judicial Branch, sister agencies, community partners and the hard-working men and women of the Department of Correction, we will be successful in our efforts to fulfill our mission and our mandates within available resources.

As many of you may know, I have served with the Department of Correction for over thirty-one years and over the course of my career I have seen and participated in many periods of rapid change and transition. I started my career at a time when the state's correction system was rapidly expanding with numerous new facilities being built and the incarcerated population growing. In 1989 when I first joined the department, the average inmate population was 8,595. That figure would grow to reach 19,894 in February of 2008. At that time the agency oversaw 18 correctional facilities. Since that point in time, we have seen a steady decline in the incarcerated population with today's count at 9,062 and have closed four facilities and numerous buildings and housing units throughout the correctional system. In 1995 we began transitioning our inmate medical operations over to the University of Connecticut Health Center and by 1997 all of our Inmate Medical Services were provided by UCHC. This arrangement lasted until July 1, 2018 when the contract between the department and UCHC ended and DOC reverted to providing inmate medical services directly. Over my thirty-one plus years in Corrections, I have seen many changes in correctional policy, from the "tough on crime" policies of the 1980s and 1990s to the social justice and reentry focused policies of today. As you can see, I am no stranger to change. One of the most important things that I have learned in my time with the department and in my time in the field of corrections is that change happens whether you like it or not and that we need to learn from our past experiences and be open to new ways of thinking and new ways of doing things if we are to navigate those changes, and the challenges change brings, successfully. I am confident that we can move forward with new thinking and new methods and still maintain safety and security for our staff, the communities we serve and the individuals under my custody and at the same time improve outcomes for those individuals in our charge returning to society. When the Governor asked me to be Commissioner, I knew from the very beginning that my tenure as Commissioner will be one of transition and unprecedented change. I believe that I am Commissioner at this point in the agency's history because I am the right person

for this job and for this transformational period. My training and professional and personal experiences have uniquely prepared and positioned me for this challenge and I am ready to lead this agency through this pandemic and into a new era.

The overwhelming majority of individuals under my custody eventually leave prison and return to communities around the state. This is a fact and part of our reality. The success or failure of these individual's ability to reintegrate into society has an enormous impact on the wellness of our communities and citizens. Providing opportunities for success for the individual is the only real solution to keeping our cities and towns safe and to keeping our judicial and correctional systems affordable.

I am not a believer in coddling the individuals under my custody, but believe that as an agency we need to be prepared for being accountable to people who account for themselves. It is necessary and appropriate for society to enact some level of punishment for those who break the law and commit a crime, but it is equally, if not more so, important for the state to do everything in its power to make sure that those individuals committed to our custody do not re-offend. Science and experience has shown us that when given the right care, support and opportunities, the vast majority of these individuals can and do return to our communities as productive members of society. Education, addiction services, mental healthcare, job training and workforce readiness training, maintaining and strengthening family and community ties and support systems and housing assistance as well as maintaining a well-trained, well-resourced and well cared for correctional staff and well-resourced and maintained correctional infrastructure are all critical components in helping these individuals turn around their lives and not reoffend. At the core of all of these is human dignity.

Everything that our department does moving forward, will be centered around human dignity; human dignity as it applies to those in our care and custody, our employees, our community and to the criminal and social justice partners that we work with. It will be at the center of everything we do with our people, how we serve our community, the way we serve each other and the way we interact here at DOC.

Our priorities for the remainder of this fiscal year and the new biennium include:

- Continuing our efforts to mitigate the impact of the COVID 19 pandemic on the individuals under our custody and on correctional staff and to support the state's greater pandemic efforts.
- Continuing and strengthening our commitment to enhance wellness initiatives that support all employees' and those under my custody – mind, body and spirit; to develop and implement progressive correctional practices and programs to increase successful reentry to our communities; to ensure safe and secure, efficient and effective operations throughout our agency; and to engage our community partners to assist in assuring positive outcomes, especially in employment, housing and education, and family unification.

- Continue to support staff wellness initiatives like the agency's Employee Assistance Unit and Employee Assistance Program to positively impact the effects of trauma in the workplace.
- Invest in the development of staff through training opportunities aligned with career pathways, evolving criminal justice initiatives and changes in correctional practices and methods as well as in the use of technology in corrections.
- Providing effective quality healthcare that meets or exceeds the community standard of care and correctional healthcare standards. We are working diligently to expand the care that we provide while also seeking to contain costs.
- Expanding and enhancing reentry efforts and activities. The path to successful reentry begins within our correctional facilities. We are able to assist in the reentry process through rehabilitative programming, education, substance abuse treatment and appropriate medical care, however, the data supports a comprehensive approach that combines both pre-and post-incarceration intervention.
- Expanding our use of technology, especially in the areas of communication, connectivity and automation.

With regard to Reentry, specifically, we plan to focus our efforts around the following:

- Reentry strategies and initiatives centered around enhanced education, employment, job readiness, housing, mentoring, and family reunification. DOC is working to reduce recidivism through both its facility based reentry programs and its community supervision efforts as well as through collaborative work with sister state agencies and our state's non-profit social service providers.
- Education is an important strategy in reducing recidivism. There is solid evidence that links education with reduced recidivism. For example, a study by the Rand Corporation found that individuals "who participate in correctional education programs had a 43 percent lower chance of recidivating than those who did not". The Department employs 74 teachers and 27 vocational instructors in its Unified School District #1 to serve the needs of a population that is assessed to need English as a second language, adult basic education, GED preparation and job skills training across a wide variety of fields. We are working to enhance our educational services to leverage education's power to reduce recidivism.
- We have hired a Director of Re-Entry Services for the Department of Correction.
- We will be continuing our work with employers in order to provide work opportunities for the individuals entering back into our communities.
  - Over the past year, the Industry/Business Advisory Group has helped us:
    - Understand that there are a lot of employers who are interested and willing to hire returning citizens.
    - Identify the barriers returning citizens have in obtaining and maintaining gainful employment.
    - Identify strategies that the DOC and the Criminal Justice system can do to increase the chances of returning citizens finding gainful employment.
- We plan to continue Pell Programs with our community colleges for the population (Virtually).

- Implementation of the Adult Reentry and Employment Strategies Implementation (ARES) Grant – The agency is working with the Department of Labor and essential community stakeholders to develop an integrated approach in addressing the vocational and employment needs of individuals with a criminal history.
- Increasing linkages with community reentry support entities.
- Increasing opportunities for family connection:
  - Implementation of technology to provide video visits to our population and family members for free.
  - E-Messaging via inmate tablets to the individuals under our custody to provide another option to communicate with family members.
  - And, as outlined in the Governor’s budget proposal, a reduction in the cost of telephone calls for the inmate population and their families. As stated in the Governor’s budget proposal “*contract renegotiation is underway for telephone services to reduce the baseline cost and reduce the commission charged to people housed inside correctional facilities and their families*”.
- Working with our sister agencies and community partners on providing housing opportunities and services:
  - Research shows us that individuals face many challenges in securing stable housing upon release from prison. Research also informs us that the lack of stable, secure housing is a significant contributor to an Individual’s potential to re-offend. Housing is the foundation for all other programs. DOC is working with the Department of Housing and other housing groups throughout the state on permanent supportive solutions and other housing initiatives aimed at providing a stable and secure residence for individuals post incarceration.
    - Rapid Rehousing Grant - Working collaboratively with the Coalition Against Homelessness and other state agencies to provide safe and suitable housing for those leaving the Department of Correction.
- Working with our sister agencies and community partners on other services that are important to successful reentry:
  - Identification and access to mass transit is essential for employment (as well as for receiving vital services such as housing, SNAP benefits, medical, mental health, and substance abuse treatment). Providing state identification cards and bus passes to discharging individuals increases a person’s chances of successfully reentering society and remaining out of prison.

With regard to custody operations, we plan to focus on the following:

- Completely overhauling the management techniques associated with the juvenile population, guided by recommendations made by the Office of the Child Advocate and the collective stakeholder groups that make up the Juvenile Justice Policy Oversight Committee (JJPOC).
- Continuing our efforts to reform Restrictive Status policy and practices with a focus on increasing meaningful out of cell time, enhancing programmatic components, reducing the overall length of the program, and allowing additional family interaction, while also maintaining safety and security as our number one priority.

With regard to healthcare for the individuals under our custody, as I mentioned earlier, the overwhelming majority of these individuals are eventually released from our jails and prisons. Health care issues not addressed during the period of incarceration will ultimately be addressed by our community health care system and primarily paid for by the public – often at a much higher cost due to worsening of the individual’s health issues post release.

States have a constitutional and legal responsibility and obligation to provide individuals under custody with “reasonably adequate” healthcare “at a level reasonably comparable with modern medical science and of a quality acceptable within prudent professional standards”.

Our goal and our constitutional obligation is to provide a community standard of care for all of the individuals under our custody. We are currently reviewing all of our healthcare policies and practices and are basing our practices on national standards such as those used and publicized by the National Commission on Correctional Health Care, the American Correctional Association and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. We are seeking to employ Medical Management and Population Health Management systems which emphasize preventative care and chronic disease management. These efforts are underway, but will take some time to be fully implemented.

Facilitating care and maintaining the continuity of care post incarceration is a critical component of successful reentry. This includes helping individuals apply for health coverage and creating linkages to community health systems and providers to ensure that the investments and positive outcomes made in an individual’s health while in prison are maintained post incarceration. DOC is actively working with its sister state agencies, including but not limited to the Departments of Social Services, Mental Health and Addiction Services, Public Health, and Veterans Affairs to ensure that continuity of care is maintained.

Finally, and most importantly, is the trained and professional staff necessary to provide quality care that in turn produces long-term savings. I would like to recognize and applaud our incredible healthcare staff and their efforts under very difficult circumstances. I know it has been extremely challenging for them, especially considering the staffing concerns we face, yet they have shown up every day and given 100% in all of their responsibilities.

Since taking over the provision of Inmate Healthcare from UCHC we have implemented numerous changes and initiatives designed to improve the quality of care provided by the department and to lower cost of our healthcare delivery system.

- Despite the challenges associated with hiring medicals staff, such as shortages in the medical services labor market, pay disparities between the private sector and state service and staff turn-over – largely driven by hazardous duty retirement, we are slowly but steadily making some headway in hiring medical staff.
  - Chief Medical Officer
  - 4 Regional Chief Operating Officers

- 2 Regional Medical Director
- 1 Chief Nurse Executive
- 2 Director of Nursing
- 1 Director of Dentistry
- Increased number of medical and dental providers - 5
- Increased number Behavioral Health staff (Supervising Psychologist, Clinical Social Workers, and Licensed Professional Counselors) - 11
- Continuous recruitment and hiring of line staff
- We have launched a system wide effort to combat HCV within our facilities. As you know, HCV infection is a critical public health issues impacting all of our communities throughout our state and nation.
  - Since 08/06/19, 14,082 individuals under our custody were tested for HCV. Of the number of individuals tested, 1,398 individuals have tested positive for HCV. 475 individuals have been treated or are currently being treated with Direct Acting Antiviral (DAA) Medications for Treatment of Chronic HCV Infection. 60 HCV positive individuals under our custody are currently being staged. Once staging has been completed they will be treated. 863 HCV positive individuals have either discharged from agency custody before treatment could begin or have self-cleared (20-45% of people who contract HCV self-clear). Testing and treatment of all intakes is ongoing.
- We have launched a significant expansion of our Medication Assisted Treatment program to combat opioid and other substance abuse disorders.
  - Offering MAT in correctional settings and treating this population has been shown to reduce recidivism, overdoses, and criminal activity and help support them in their recovery from substance use disorders and further health, safety and economic viability in our communities.
- We are beginning to utilize our Electronic Health Records system and national correctional healthcare standards and best practices to implement a Population Health Management system. Our goal is to become a leader in population health programs for chronic diseases.
- We have increased agency partnerships (such as partnering with the Department of Social Services to leverage their knowledge, experience and expertise in the areas of utilization and population health management, pharmacy formulary management, and medical billing and payment and the Department of Public Health on the agency's COVID 19 response) and linkages in the community through enhanced discharge planning and continuity of care initiatives.
- Address long-term health issues facing our aging population by developing a long-term care unit.
- Increase our utilization of technology to enhance care and lower costs, including telehealth, tele-ekgs, video conversation ability for our on-call providers, in house mammography, panoramic digital dental x-ray and point of care serum chemistry testing, among others.

As I stated above, the size of the population of individuals under our custody has steadily declined over the past several years. This decline has been the result of numerous

changes in our criminal justice system as well as the impact of demographic and societal changes within our state. The decrease of individuals under our custody has allowed for the closure of numerous facilities over the past decade and with the Governor's proposed budget, this trend continues with the planned closure of the Northern Correctional Facility in Somers Connecticut by July 1, 2021 and the planned closure of two additional facilities over the course of the new biennium.

Another looming challenge for this department, as well as for all other state agencies, is the potential impact of the 2022 "Silver Tsunami". We estimate that we may likely see the retirement of 553 employees between now and July 1, 2022. Normally, over that time period, we would expect to see approximately 436 retirements. The reallocation of correctional staff from the facilities that are scheduled to close this biennium will help mitigate the impact of this retirement event. As such with the redistribution of staff and the careful management of incoming Academy classes and approvals of other backfills, we do not anticipate significant difficulties with maintaining our correctional workforce as it relates to the 2022 retirement concern. In order to weather the loss of institutional knowledge as well as manpower in the agency's administrative functions, the agency is working to capture as much of that institutional knowledge through the development of written procedures and manuals and through knowledge transfer and cross training.

With regard to our physical plant, I am pleased to report that the department has partnered with the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection, the Department of Administrative Services and the Connecticut Green Bank to install 10 ground mounted solar voltaic arrays on land next to correctional facilities in Somers and Cheshire which will produce about 13 megawatts of electricity. When the Master Power Purchase Agreement is approved by the Attorneys General Office the DOC would enter into a power-purchase agreement with the Green Bank. Under the agreement the Green Bank or an assigned owner would install, own and maintain the arrays and the DOC would purchase the electricity produced at a discounted rate. This would reduce the cost electricity for the DOC compared to buying that portion of power from grid suppliers.

Before concluding I would like to discuss our agency's response to the COVID 19 pandemic and our continuing efforts to manage this unparalleled period in our history.

As we all know, events moved rapidly in March of 2020 as the transmission of COVID 19 in Connecticut, and in much of the US, quickly accelerated. The state and DOC diligently raced to ramp up our response to this unprecedented crisis amidst evolving and ever changing guidance from the CDC, and other public health, scientific and medical advisory groups, and amidst a severely disrupted supply chain, for everything from PPE, medical supplies, and cleaning supplies, to personal hygiene supplies and paper goods and food. From day one and throughout this crisis our staff have stepped up to meet the challenges of this pandemic head on. Despite personal risk they continued, and continue, to fulfill their obligations and responsibilities to provide safe, secure and humane oversight of the inmate population and to provide all necessary and appropriate care and protection.

This department has led the way nationally in best practices regarding the mitigation of the impact of COVID 19 in a correctional environment.

In response to the pandemic DOC:

- Suspended social visits and volunteer and vendor access to protect the individuals under our custody from transmission from outside our facilities
- Placed focus on continuous cleaning and disinfecting throughout our facilities
- Modified movement and created a 3 phase operational plan that could be applied at any location
- Initiated an intake screening for all individuals under our custody including a 14-day separation at the jails to monitor anyone coming from the street for COVID signs and symptoms before allowing access to the general population
- Initiated a screening and temperature check for all employees at the 14 correctional facilities and at each of the 5 parole districts
- Placed CDC posters in high traffic areas for the education of individuals under our custody. These were later updated to include testing and then vaccination education
- Limited inter-facility transfers to essential only to further mitigate the transmission of COVID 19 within our system
- Centralized positive COVID-19 individuals under our custody at one location (which has contributed to the preservation of statewide PPE inventory and consolidated critical nursing care services) – Northern Correctional Institution in the spring and then to MacDougall-Walker during the second wave beginning this past Fall.
- Provide weekly distribution of masks to all facility locations - cloth masks being produced internally by offender industry workers, surgical masks, KN95 masks and N95 masks, with a policy associated with the use of each. As the crisis has evolved, this policy was later revised to mandate that masks be worn at all time while on DOC premises.
- Created a website page specific from COVID-19 with daily postings of data points, pandemic plans, press releases and memos for staff, individuals under our custody and family members,
- Centralization of community release COVID positive patients to one location - Cohegan House on the grounds of the Corrigan-Radgowski Correctional Center.
- Introduced the use of newly acquired cleaning technology to disinfect large areas within our facilities, and targeting locations identified as “hot spots” for the virus.
- Prioritized release reviews for individuals under our custody considered high risk if exposed to COVID - individuals over the age of 50 and those with high medical scores. This policy was later revised to include inmates age 40 and older.
- Adherence to the settlement agreement with the ACLU governing hygiene products, cleaning, testing and cohorts, and releases
- Implemented monthly and then weekly staff testing protocols
- Implemented inmate testing protocols:
  - Mass testing of the individuals under our custody bi-weekly
  - Testing at intake (from community) at the beginning of the 14-day quarantine and at the end of the 14-day quarantine

- Testing prior to release
- Testing prior to any community medical appointment
- Testing when symptomatic
- Testing when identified through contact tracing
- Weekly mandatory testing for direct care employees
- Education of the individuals under our custody on COVID-19 and on the vaccines currently approved for use.

Additionally, the department's Fiscal Services unit worked closely with the Department of Administrative Services, the Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security, OPM and the Office of the State Comptroller on the procurement of PPE and other supplies and other procurement activities in support of the State's comprehensive pandemic response.

I am very proud of how our agency has met the challenges of COVID-19 and very proud of the men and women of our agency in how they have conducted themselves in the face of this great danger and the personal sacrifices that they have made on behalf of our state. Each of them is a hero of this pandemic.

Please know that we remain committed to controlling costs and pursuing efficiencies, where possible, while continuing our primary mission of maintaining a safe, professional, humane, and efficient correctional system. DOC is dedicated to honoring the rights of crime victims, to making sure individuals receive the oversight and interventions needed to reduce recidivism and lower crime, and to helping individuals overcome addiction and continue on the pathway to recovery. We will continue to strive to improve public safety for the citizens of Connecticut, to ensure a safe environment for staff, and to provide those in our care with progressive opportunities to safely reintegrate into their communities as productive and successful members of society.

I appreciate this opportunity to speak with you today, and we would be happy to answer your questions.