

Re: Amendment to Bill #5650 to Extend Hazardous Duty Retirement Benefits to Correctional Clericals

Good afternoon Chairman Prague and honorable members of this committee. My name is Theresa Rinaldi. For the past thirteen years I have worked at a maximum security prison in an office which is located behind three locked gates. Because I am classified as a clerical, I am not offered the same retirement benefits as all other Department of Correction employees. By just walking into a maximum security environment we are being subjected to possible inmate assault. We are exposed to the same diseases and stress levels as all other departmental employees. We are working in an environment that is placing our health and safety at risk on a daily basis. If clericals are not at risk, why are we taught self-defense and offered body alarms?

We are primary responders on the facilities' Emergency Response Plans and are informed that in the event of an emergency in our area, we will be locked in, just like anyone else. In an institutional emergency, the situation is contained to the smallest area possible. If we happen to be in that area, so be it. Just like hazardous duty employees, our safety will be sacrificed.

Over the years we have been locked in the facility and not permitted to leave during riots, disturbances, fights, gang related incidents, fires, inmate escapes, bomb threats and anthrax threats – just to name a few. Since the vast majority of our co-workers do not know that we are not receiving hazardous duty benefits, they expect everyone to react in the same manner when an incident occurs. Clericals are held to equal performance standards without equal benefits.

In closing, it is important to note that clerical employees represent less than 3% of the total number of DOC workers – about the size of one correction officer academy class. Therefore, inclusion of clericals in the hazardous duty benefit package will not create a budgetary burden for the State of Connecticut or the Department of Correction. It is merely extending equal benefits to a small group who should have been receiving them all along.

Your support to extend equal Hazardous Duty Retirement Benefits to Correctional Clericals is both appropriate and appreciated.

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