



SEIU Local 2001
Stronger Together

March 13, 2006

Senator Andrew McDonald
Representative Michael Lawlor
Chairs of the Judiciary Committee
State of Connecticut
General Assembly
Hartford, Ct 06106

Dear Sirs,

Distinguished Members of the committee I am here today to speak in support of House Bill #5542.

I am the President of the Corrections Supervisors' Council. Our union represents 600 supervisors in the Department of Correction (Lieutenants, Training Officers, Captains, and Counselor Supervisors). I have been a member of the Department of Correction for 16 1/2 years. I have worked at the following facilities Niantic CI, Brooklyn CC, York CI, Corrigan CC, Radgowski CC, Gates CI and Bergin CC.

It is my honor to speak for this piece of needed legislation. Since the closing of Norwich State Hospital and Fairfield Hills the Department of Correction has experienced an increasing number of mentally ill inmates. This increase has put a great burden on our members and on these inmates also.

I believe this legislation will work to correct a great wrong. This wrong is the criminalization of mental illness. Inmates with certain mental illnesses used to be diverted by the courts to the aforementioned hospitals. The closing of these hospitals in conjunction with the downsizing of Connecticut Valley Hospital has led to an unavailability of beds for people so disposed to be incarcerated as a last avenue of protection for them and the general public.

Currently there are over 3000 inmates incarcerated with diagnoses of mental illness. This has resulted in the requirement of the Department of Correction dedicating a correctional facility for inmates with mental illness. This facility services approximately 650 inmates. The rest of the so designated inmates are in general population around the state. This begs the question "Why did we close psychiatric facilities if the need still exists".

I feel this is a form of socio-economic discrimination as those with the ability to have medical insurance have better access to treatment if you belong to the working poor and can not afford such

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care your avenue is now incarceration. Thus, this has led to an incarceration of those with mental illness who are of lower socio-economic status.

When the states' psychiatric hospitals were closed, the PROMISE was that some sort of supportive living environments would be provided for those with such a need. WE HAVE FAILED TO KEEP THIS PROMISE. This lack requires that the Department of Correction now provide that need but still does not meet their needs when they leave the Department of Correction.

The Department of Correction is ill equipped to handle this need, as many facilities do not have 24 -hour medical care and little to no mental health care. This leaves correctional custody staff the responsibility to handle issues which may and do arise surrounding medical/mental health care.

The training area is a concern as training in this area focuses on identification of mental illnesses and is conducted by non-medical/mental health personnel. I believe this training should be done only by medical or mental health professionals and should be on communication skills needed in dealing with inmates with these conditions.

There is a current Office of Protection and Advocacy vs. the Department of Correction agreement. However, this only covers Northern CI and Garner CI it by its agreement leaves out youthful offenders who are housed at Manson Youth Institution and female offenders housed at York CI.

I believe the best step would be to turn Garner CI over to DMHAS, as they best know how to handle this unique population. I also believe that there should be more community based supportive living environments provided. I do not believe that this will happen therefore we are left with the situation as it is. I am asking that this legislation be passed which would require better treatment that is more expansive for inmates with mental illness.

It is my hope that this legislation will require the department to better staff the prisons in regards to mental health professionals. One of the issues that would be handled I believe is that it should be medical or mental health personnel who stay by the side of an inmate placed in 4-point restraints not custody staff.

I believe that our members are not protected by the laws on the books nor is the designated inmate population. Please note the Connecticut Supreme Court in Wiseman vs. the State of Connecticut

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stated that in order for inmates to have these rights it must be legislated. Copy of decision is attached to my testimony.

I thank you for your time and ask for your help in passing this legislation.

Sincerely,

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