

– Testimony –
Judiciary Committee – 13 MAR 2006

Good afternoon Senator McDonald & Representative Lawlor and all distinguished committee members.

My name is Gene Tewksbury I'm VP of Connecticut Correction Employees, Local 1565 and I have 20 years of state service as a Correction Officer.

I am here today to speak in favor of Bill 5542 – An Act Concerning the Rights of Inmates with Psychiatric Disabilities.

It is my belief that with the closing of Norwich State Hospital, ten years ago, that it became a crime, in this state, to have a mental disorder.

More and more residents of Connecticut with mental issues are becoming inmates, because there is just no place else – to treat them.

The Department of Correction has turned an entire prison into a Psychiatric Care Facility.

This has left the intake facilities, the Jails – Hartford, New Haven, Bridgeport and Corrigan CI, with little or no Mental Health Staff and none of the DOC Facilities have 24 hour Mental Health Staff.

All of the male inmates come into the system through these facilities and all the female inmates enter through York CI.

The increased Medical/Mental Health staffing at Garner CI (Psychiatric Care Facility) has left the intake facilities short of these critical specialties.

This can lead to an increase in suicides and/or physical abuse by other inmates.

I will give an example of Inmate Abuse that recently took place, do in part to the lack of proper Psychiatric screening when entering the system.

An eighteen year old, 145 lb. inmate with a psychiatric history was placed in a cell with a 39 year old, 245 lb. inmate; who was arrested for raping a 16 year old boy.

This bill will help prevent inmates with psychiatric issues from becoming victims within the Department of Corrections.

Thank you & are there any questions

Gene Tewksbury