



State of Connecticut

JUDICIAL BRANCH

OFFICE OF THE CHIEF COURT ADMINISTRATOR
COURT SUPPORT SERVICES DIVISION
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Testimony of William H. Carbone
Judiciary Committee Public Hearing
March 13, 2006

Raised Bill No. 5651 ("An Act Adopting the Recommendations of the Report of the Commission on Prison and Jail Overcrowding")

Good Afternoon. My name is William H. Carbone. I am the Executive Director of the Court Support Services Division of the Judicial Branch. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the Branch today on **Raised Bill No. 5651**, *An Act Adopting the Recommendations of the Report of the Commission on Prison and Jail Overcrowding*.

I am very encouraged by the recent trends in prison population in Connecticut. Past recommendations from the PJOC and current efforts by the Department of Correction, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, and the Judicial Branch have resulted in a declining prison and jail population in Connecticut over the past three years. The benefits of this trend to state government, taxpayers, and local communities are numerous.

To assure that these positive trends continue in the coming years, the recommendations of the 2006 report of the PJOC must be carefully considered. I will speak briefly today about two of the recommendations that I feel are of great importance.

First, I strongly support the recommendation to expand the jail reentries program, currently operated by the Court Support Services Division. In Calendar Year 2005, the jail reinterview program interviewed nearly 8,700 pre-trial defendants under the custody of the Department of Correction. Of those interviewed, nearly 5,000 were released to the community. The expansion of this program includes staff and services to address the specialized

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mental health needs of defendants at three Department of Correction facilities and adolescent services for youthful defendants at the Manson Youth Institution. The adoption of this recommendation would allow an already successful model to attend to populations currently underserved.

Second, the recommendation to expand the Probation Transition Program and the Technical Violations Unit to all probation offices in the state is not only one that I vigorously support; it is a recommendation that is mirrored in a recent report by Central Connecticut State University. An evaluation following the implementation and preliminary outcomes of these two programs yields some positive findings.

Some brief background on these programs is necessary: In October 2004, the Judicial Branch established the Technical Violation Unit and the Probation Transition Program. Technical Violation Units were developed in six probation offices to target probationers who are in violation of probation and reduce the risk of incarceration for these violations. Technical Violation Units are in operation in New Haven, Bridgeport, New London, Hartford, Waterbury, and New Britain.

The Probation Transition Program targets inmates who have terms of probation supervision upon their discharge from the Department of Correction. The goal is to increase the likelihood of a successful probation period for split sentence probationers by reducing the number and intensity of technical violations during the initial period of probation. In each special program, ten highly trained, experienced Officers have caseloads of only twenty-five probationers. The average length of time spent in these programs is four months.

To augment the increased involvement of the Probation Officer in these special programs, CSSD used appropriations from Public Act 04-234 to contract with several community-based, non-profit organizations to provide 131 treatment beds for substance abusing probationers and priority referral status in our network of outpatient substance

abuse and mental health providers and Alternative Incarceration Centers. Here are some of the CCSU findings:

Through October 1, 2005, 469 probationers had been referred to the Technical Violation Unit. Of the 344 who had been in the program for 120 days, 70 percent had not violated their terms of probation in these 120 days. While many of the probationer cases involving violation are still pending court action, a small sample shows that fewer than half have been sentenced to a new term of incarceration.

The findings for the Probation Transition Program are similarly positive. In the first year of the program, 532 probationers discharging from Department of Correction custody were served. The researchers from CCSU concluded that only 8% of the Probation Transition Program probationers violated their probation in the first 120 days following release from prison or jail. Just 3% of these were technical violations.

These programs are staffed by officers with caseloads capped at 25 probationers. I believe, and the initial evaluation findings support, that lower caseloads lead to lower rates of probation violation and, ultimately, lower rates of recidivism. It is for this reason that I offer one final recommendation: All probation caseloads should be significantly reduced from the current average of 123 probationers per probation officer. By supporting the recommendation to expand the special probation programs and supporting a simultaneous initiative to hire more probation officers to lower regular caseloads, we can greatly increase the likelihood of impacting incarcerations resulting from violation of probation. I hope you will help us with our plan to reduce overall probation caseloads.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you regarding the adoption of these very important recommendations of the PJOC.