

SEIU Local 2001



Stronger Together

March 12, 2008

Representative Michael Lawlor, Co-Chair
Senator Andrew McDonald, Co-Chair
Connecticut General Assembly Joint Committee on Judiciary
Room 2500, Legislative Office Building
Hartford, CT 06106

Re: **S.B. 668: "An Act Concerning Prison Overcrowding"**

Chairman Lawlor, Chairman McDonald, and members of the Judiciary Committee;

My name is Roland Bishop, and I am a state school teacher in the Connecticut Department of Corrections (DOC), where I have worked for five years. Currently my job duties focus on teaching female inmates in the York Correctional Institution.

I am also a union steward in CSEA/SEIU Local 2001, and my fellow members and I believe that comprehensive criminal justice reform requires an investment in our institutions' educational and vocational workforce. That is why I am submitting this testimony in **favor of SB 668: "An Act Concerning Prison Overcrowding."**

Section 3 of the proposed bill states:

"In determining the suitability of an inmate for release on parole, the Board of Pardons and Paroles may consider whether an inmate has earned a high school equivalency diploma or is taking classes toward such diploma. If an inmate is taking classes toward such diploma as of such inmate's parole release date, the board may require, as a condition of such parole release, that such inmate continue such classes and earn such diploma."

We agree. Improving educational opportunities – and creating incentives for inmates that work for them – will make a difference. Not only will it have a positive affect on reducing recidivism, it will affect whether an inmate returns to society functional, or is returned back to us in corrections.

I understand that this is not a popular opinion. Recently a Connecticut newspaper columnist dismissed services to educate inmates as a misguided premise "that social work can solve everything." Unfortunately the only answer he came up with was adopting the model of prisons as merely warehouses for the incarcerated.

The reality is that due to economics, politics and the Constitution, most inmates will be released sometime. I believe the public expects us do our best to prevent inmates from coming out of prison worse than when they went in.

Michael J. O'Brien
President

Patrice Peterson
Secretary/Treasurer

Robert D. Rinker
Executive Director

SERVICE EMPLOYEES
INTERNATIONAL UNION
CLC, CTW

CONNECTICUT STATE
EMPLOYEES ASSOCIATION
760 Capitol Avenue
Hartford, CT 06106-1206
860.951.6614
Toll Free 1.800.894.9479
FL Toll Free 1.800.437.5630
Fax 860.951.3526



In general, I believe inmate needs to be making progress before they should be considered for release. This should include an evaluation of the inmate's performance while enrolled in school, which could be a General Educational Development (GED) program, and/or vocational training, such as computer skills or commercial cleaning. The DOC "Inmate Work Evaluation" form could be utilized as a standard for education reporting in the consideration of an inmate's supervised release.

Prison-based education is not grounded in the belief that we as society should reward criminals for their bad behavior. Instead we provide job training, life skills coaching, and education to lessen the likelihood that inmates will return to crime when they are released into our communities.

No system is perfect, and there are no guarantees that educating an inmate will prevent them from breaking laws in the future. The only guarantee is that if we continue to fail to provide services to up to three-quarters of our inmate population, they will continue to be recycled back to us in the judicial, correction, and parole system.

Policymakers, legislators, and opinion leaders alike must recognize that criminal justice reform is not about bricks and mortar; it's about the people who will make it work more efficiently and competently. SB 668 will empower professionals like myself to achieve this goal, and that is why I urge the Committee to pass it.

Thank you for your time and for hearing my voice on this critical matter.

Roland Bishop

State School Teacher, York CI, CT Dept. of Correction
Steward, P-3B Council, CSEA/SEIU Local 2001

cc: Members, Connecticut General Assembly Judiciary Committee