



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"**
H.B. 5914: "AN ACT CONCERNING PROGRAMS AND SERVICES FOR FEMALE INMATES"

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

My name is Mark Lucey and I am submitting this testimony in **support** of SB 668: **"An Act Concerning Prison Overcrowding,"** and HB 5914: **"An Act Concerning Programs and Services for Female Inmates."** These bills provide a set of good first steps in addressing the need for reform within the Department of Correction.

I have been a Correctional Lieutenant for the last thirteen and a half years and I have over eighteen years of service in the DOC. I currently work at the Robinson Correctional Institution.

I am also the elected Executive Vice President of the Corrections Supervisors' Council in CSEAVSEIU Local 2001. Our Council includes six hundred professionals in the DOC, representing lieutenants, training officers, captains, and counselor supervisors. Our union also represents educational professionals, vocational instructors, recreational counselors, rehabilitative staff, and Information technology professionals working in the DOC.

My fellow members and I believe the solution for safer communities across Connecticut requires investing the resources needed to achieve four fundamental goals:

1). Appropriate inmate and staffing levels for safe and secure facilities.

It is important to establish upper limits on the number of inmates housed in each facility. Absent those limits, we can see how the DOC handles an increase in this population – by "housing them in non-traditional spaces", or what you and I would call putting inmates' beds in closets, class rooms and gyms.

If we have more inmates, we do need more staff. However, the measures before you only call for more correctional officers (COs). While we support the call for more COs, we feel that doesn't solve the problem of staffing – we also need more supervisors, counselors, instructors, and other support staff to handle the needs

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



of a rising prison population.

Limits in this bill could mean more recruiting, another costly round of prison construction, wholesale release programs, or a thorough re-evaluation of what offenses deserve incarceration and for how long.

We've already tried shipping excess inmates out of state, and that didn't work very well. I realize each one of these propositions could result in tough and unpopular political choices, but those choices are going to be required of you as elected leaders. Not making a choice is the wrong choice.

2). Effective support for our correctional supervisors and COs.

This includes training for DOC professionals, access to pre- and post-incarceration supportive housing for inmates with mental health disorders.

Thanks to your Committee, legislation creating a mental-health training program for our workforce and establishing a process for tracking inmates suffering from mental health disorders was passed by the General Assembly and signed into law by the Governor last July. We believe the training must be expanded to include ALL correctional staff, regardless of the facility where they work or whether they are working with inmates with mental health issues.

Today, we are responsible for over 4,500 inmates who have been diagnosed with some form of mental illness. Though we have a dedicated facility for inmates diagnosed with mental health disorders, it only houses approximately 650. Out of those 650, 200 are inmate workers assigned to food service, janitorial, and other work details who are not mentally ill. Where are the other 4,050 inmates afflicted with mental illness? We see them in the general population in our facilities all over the state. DOC must assess whether many could be served in a more cost-effective setting, such as supportive housing.

The legislation passed last year is an important first step. As the inmate population has risen in the past few months, a greater investment of resources into effective mental health services training for DOC professionals and more pre- and post-incarceration supportive housing for inmates with a mental health disorder is necessary to meet this expanding need.

3). Effective educational services for inmates to reduce recidivism.

I've talked with fellow union members who work as educators within DOC, and I know that to reform how we handle – and eventually release – the incarcerated, we cannot ignore the need to invest in the educational and vocational workforce in our institutions.

Today, up to three-quarters of Connecticut's inmates receive no occupational training or educational developments while incarcerated. While many options are available, there are long waiting lists for inmates seeking to take advantage of services and take jobs within correctional facilities.

For example in the early 1990's, Robinson CI once had as many as eighteen inmate work details with a total of 1,350 inmates confined to the facility. Today, the facility's inmate count is approximately 1,485, but only has six inmate work details, not including janitorial and food service jobs within the facility.

It is in all our interests to prepare the incarcerated to be productive members of society when they eventually return to our neighborhoods. To accomplish this, we need to improve the education system within DOC. Such an investment will enable the attainment of a real education, the development of

social skills and the realization of vocational skills training to be assessed, along with other criteria, before making the critical decision to release an inmate to the community. Section 3 of SB 668: **"An Act Concerning Prison Overcrowding"** before you is a good first step in encouraging inmates to learn real world skills and gain some education in order to gain release from prison.

This reform will require a comprehensive approach that brings criminal justice agencies and community transitional-service providers together to achieve common goals.

4). Seamless communications among criminal justice and public safety agencies.

I want to reiterate our union's recommendation regarding the communication gaps that exist between public safety agencies, criminal justice units, and the judicial branch. The Governor has signed landmark contract reform legislation that should prevent scandals like the one involving MAXIMUS, the private, out-of-state IT services consultant that has failed to upgrade the COLLECT criminal database. Specifically, we believe services such as this that directly impact public safety – and the public safety workforce – should not be contracted-out in the first place.

In conclusion, we believe the DOC is currently doing what it can to handle our growing prison population. However, its resources are being pushed to their maximum capacities. That is why it is imperative for your committee to take proactive measures in providing the resources needed for secure facilities, effective educational and mental health services for the incarcerated, and reliable, seamless communications among our agencies.

Thank you for hearing my voice on this critical matter.

Mark L. Lucey Sr.

Correctional Lieutenant, Carl Robinson CI, CT Dept. of Correction
Vice President, Correction Supervisors Council, CSEA/SEIU Local 2001

cc: Members, Connecticut General Assembly Judiciary Committee