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**Testimony before the Judiciary Committee
African-American Affairs Commission
Wednesday March 12th, 2008
12.00 pm in Room 2E of the LOB**

Good afternoon, Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Frank Sykes. I am the Legislative Analyst representing the African-American Affairs Commission. I am speaking in support of:

House Bill. (HB) 5917 – An act concerning a Department of Correction Advisory Commission.

And

Senate Bill. (SB) 668 – An act concerning prison overcrowding

In reference to ***(HB) 5917***. the time has come for the legislature to seriously examine the needs of Connecticut's inmates. Often the discussion revolves

around providing essential resources for ex-offenders re-integrating into the community. This is certainly important; however there is a lot that goes on behind prison walls that does not get enough scrutiny. As such the sometimes the rights of inmates may be compromised or not given enough attention. This bill seeks to break this silence by providing a vehicle through which inmates can voice their concerns, air their grievances as it relates to their welfare behind bars. The defining feature of this Task Force is that there will be ex-offenders who will bring their experiences to the table and participate in decisions that affect Connecticut's prison population. These ex-offenders have first hand knowledge of prison conditions and can provide insight and expertise to influence policy decisions concerning prison reform.

Roughly 40 to 43 percent of the state's prison population is African-American and anywhere from 10,000 to 11,000 are released annually.¹ Ex-offenders face numerous challenges transitioning into the society. However the single most daunting obstacle towards re-integration is securing employment. This is not surprising, considering that less than half enter correctional facilities without a high school diploma, likewise over half leave correctional facilities without a high diploma. In view of this the Commission supports the concept of the language in section 3 of **(SB) 668**. This section seeks to provide incentives to inmates to receive a high school diploma. Obviously this is easier said than done without Department of Corrections itself providing the infrastructure for this to happen. Nonetheless the Commission fully supports any efforts designed to motivate inmates to pursue a high school diploma and further. This is progressive policy that should at least enhance their employability.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

¹ Connecticut Department of Corrections, *Sentenced Inmates Incarcerated in Discharged to EOS or Community between Count by Inmate 01/01/06-10/25/06*