



**AFRICAN-AMERICAN AFFAIRS COMMISSION
STATE CAPITOL
HARTFORD, CONNECTICUT 06106-1591
(860) 240-8555
FAX (860) 240-8444**

**Testimony before the Judiciary Committee
Tuesday, March 24, 2009 at 12: 00 P. M. in Room 2C**

Good afternoon, Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Glenn Cassis. I am the Executive Director representing the African-American Affairs Commission (AAAC). I am speaking in support of:

***House Bill (HB) 6533 – An act concerning a Department of Correction
Advisory Commission.***

Roughly 43 percent of the state's prison population is African-American and anywhere from 10,000 to 11,000 are released annually.¹ Often the discussion revolves around providing essential resources for ex-offenders re-integrating into the community. This is certainly important however the time has come for our

¹ Connecticut Department of Corrections, *Incarcerated Population as of 01/09*

state to seriously examine the needs and rights of Connecticut's inmates. There is a lot that goes on behind prison walls that goes unnoticed, mainly because prisons are a closed system and there is also a general lack of awareness and interest in how state policies violate prisoner's rights. Whether it is limiting prisoners' access to courts, lack of healthcare or lack of educational opportunities, without question the needs of prisoners are numerous.

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. Last year the Commission supported language in section 3 of **(SB) 668**. because we believed that it could enhance the employability of ex-offenders. That bill attempted to provide incentives to inmates to receive a high school diploma. Unfortunately that bill died in the legislative process. The bill before us today is even stronger because it addresses prisoner rights and concerns in a more comprehensive way. This Task Force through its work will have first hand knowledge of prison conditions and can provide insight and expertise to influence policy decisions regarding prisoner concerns and needs.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify.