

**Judiciary Committee  
Public Hearing**

**March 24, 2009**

**Testimony of Theresa C. Lantz, Commissioner, Department of Correction**

Good afternoon, Senator McDonald, Representative Lawlor and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee. I am Theresa Lantz, Commissioner for the Department of Correction and submit this testimony on the following bill:

**Raised Bill No. 6533 An Act Concerning a Department of Correction Advisory Commission**

The Department believes that the establishment of an advisory commission is unnecessary and would add to the cost of the state in this economic and resource limited environment.

Since 2003, the Department has significantly increased the level of transparency and openness that our stakeholders appreciate and deserve. This is a critical component in the constant and progressive evolution of our complex agency as there is always room for improvement and growth. We have worked diligently to enhance confidence in the Department and to make it more responsive to the legislature, advocacy groups, already established commissions, our host communities and the public at large with regard to systems, policies, procedures and practices within the operations of the DOC. Our comprehensive public website details our administrative directives, programs and services, agency and inmate data, publications, contact information and a wide array of facility information.

We are receptive to external involvement in our operations and continue to work closely with the many non-profit and advocacy groups. There are already statutorily mandated Public Safety Committees in municipalities that host a correctional facility. These committees are comprised of the facility warden and members of the community who are appointed by the chief elected official. They meet at least quarterly and submit to the Judiciary Committee issues of concern and recommendations regarding safety and security. The Criminal Justice policy Advisory Commission also identifies and reviews institution-based and community-based programs and services that address inmate and offender needs. In addition, the DOC continues to be monitored by other state and federal agencies, as well as by the independent Office of the Correctional Ombudsman for the past 35 years.

The proposed legislation could create conflict and interfere with the statutory obligation of the DOC commissioner to be responsible for effectively administering agency operations and programs. The courts have ruled that because prisons are unique places, fraught with security dangers, it is inappropriate to second guess correctional

administrators and that the courts should defer to the expertise of experienced prison officials. It appears that this newly proposed commission, comprised of no correctional expert or professional, would study and make recommendations on a variety of areas as to which members would have little or no expertise, experience or qualifications.

This bill is unnecessary and unwarranted at this time.

Thank you for your consideration of the Department's views on Raised Bill No. 6533.