

**Appropriations Committee
Public Hearing
February 23, 2009**

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

Good afternoon Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, and members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Commissioner Theresa Lantz and I am pleased to come before you today to speak in support of Governor Rell's proposed biennial budget for the Connecticut Department of Correction. With me is Mr. Robert Farr, the Chairman of the Board of Pardons and Paroles, and Dr. Robert Trestman, from the University of Connecticut Health Center representing our contracted health care provider, Correctional Managed Health Care. In addition, I am joined by members of my executive team to assist in responding to any technical questions.

The Governor's budget proposal for the Department of Correction is a prudent and reasonable financial accounting given the daunting challenges we face in our current economic distress. It supports our core mission to protect the public through the maintenance of safety, security and good order within our correctional facilities. It provides the tools to continue offender reentry strategies and criminal justice reforms enacted under Public Acts 08-01 and 08-51 during the last legislative session. These reforms have been implemented throughout the criminal justice system, and our processes have become more effective and efficient as well as better informed as a result.

As a brief update on the status of the Department, let me advise you that our incarcerated population today is over 700 below our all time high from last February. In fact, we are now at February 2007 levels. I wish to thank you, the Governor, my dedicated and professional staff, and my sister agencies and community partners for the collaboration and support which has allowed us to better the OPM population projections, at a time when many criticized and doubted

our resolve to successfully manage our population. In contrast to events across the country, I am proud to report that our facilities have remained secure, safe and without major incident. And as a result of the population decline, we have been able to close some of the buildings and overflow areas across the agency, and diminish our overtime costs. We anticipate that as the Board of Parole continues its momentum toward increased and enhanced parole hearings, that we can continue our trend of effective population management.

Across my agency we are working actively to reduce costs wherever possible. We are in the process of a comprehensive staff review and reallocation that will insure that full use is made of all available personnel, particularly where refills will not be available for the foreseeable future. We are reviewing our program compendium to insure that our finite resources are spent on rehabilitative programs that will have the most effective impact on the offender population. In Food Services we are working continuously to find opportunity buys and adjust our menu to minimize the cost of providing nearly 21 million nutritionally balanced meals each year, and we aggressively seek prompt payment discounts to further control our costs. Our Engineering staff is actively pursuing energy savings by adopting state of the art technology in lighting, laundry processing, water conservation and in reducing effluent. We have minimized general expenses across the board, from personal service agreements to the use of cell phones and vehicles. We are using Department staff to provide a number of maintenance and inspection services that in the past were provided by outside contractors. In Inmate Medical Services, we are extremely pleased that UConn Correctional Managed Health Care has projected a \$1 million surplus for Fiscal Year 2009. A further example of our renewed collaboration in support of the Memorandum of Agreement.

After extensive analysis of our needs and in support of RBA goals, the Department is undertaking a comprehensive re-procurement of our non-profit community services contracts, to

better address the risk and needs of offenders who are rejoining their communities. This process was undertaken to insure that every program has accountability and performance measures that support offender reentry and productive citizenship while being cost effective.

In the area of reentry and working within the framework of Public Acts 08-1 and 08-51, we have made great progress in further enhancing the public safety. We have:

- Developed, and in the process of fully implementing, a Risk Assessment Strategy based on evidence-based practices (report submitted to the Legislature for January 1, 2009)
- Formulated a statewide Reentry Strategy (report submitted to the Legislature for February 15, 2009)
- Expanded the utilization of GPS and Electronic Frequency tracking systems to enhance offender accountability in the community
- Coordinated extensively, along with the Board of Pardons and Paroles, with the Judicial Branch to assure access to records such as PSI's, sentencing transcripts, mental health evaluations, and juvenile records.
- Expanded video conferencing among Judicial, Board of Pardons & Paroles and correctional facilities to expedite hearings, reduce costs and improve security.
- Expanded our preventive Time Out Program for offenders on Parole and Transitional Supervision who are at risk of full community failure due to technical violations, providing them with an intense institutional based intervention to target specific behaviors and needs.
- Implemented a program with the Department of Motor Vehicles to aid inmates who are legal citizens in obtaining official state identification that is essential upon release for housing, employment, and banking services.

As always, the resource most important to our success is the dedicated work of our professional correctional staff members, who continue to set the national standard for our industry.

We all fully recognize that the current economy and associated fiscal constraints will not allow us to do everything that we would like to do. We know that we will be faced with many challenges, whether in maintaining a huge and demanding physical infrastructure or completing key work initiated toward replacing our archaic inmate and parole information systems. Overall, I am confident that we will maintain safe and secure operations under the Governor's proposed budget. Her budget supports our current level of services, but will challenge us to manage our facilities and our resources even more efficiently than before. The Governor maintains current staffing levels for the Department and for the Board of Pardons and Paroles, but vigorous control of staff deployment and overtime will be necessary. In Other Expenses, our very best efforts will be required to control the rising cost of meals, to conserve energy, and to maintain our facilities efficiently and securely. In Workers Compensation, where we are flat-funded next year, we have recently experienced an increase in Workers Compensation re-injury claims (not new claims). We are working with the Department of Administrative Services to identify potential causes and solutions in order to meet the appropriation. UConn Correctional Managed Health Care will share our challenge in the coming year, to maintain services while reducing their total costs even more than they did this year. In Community Support Services the Governor supports the expanded level of reentry services and supervision begun in Fiscal 2008. In all these areas, a continued, stable level/count of the inmate population will be an important factor in our success.

I am encouraged that the Governor's proposal supports restoration of my discretion to place qualified inmates on furlough with up to 45 days of community supervision. Prior to its elimination last year, and prior to the enhancements of community supervision strategies implemented in the past year, the 30-day furlough program had a 97% successful completion

rate. This is clearly the most successful discretionary program available to the incarcerated population. In addition to improving the reentry process, this option also reduces the incarcerated population and reduces our costs.

In closing, I am highly sensitive of the magnitude of the Department of Correction's budget appropriation, and I am dedicated to finding cost effective solutions to these challenges while protecting the safety of the public, my staff, and those who are committed to my supervision. With the leadership of the Governor, the guidance of the General Assembly and the collaboration of our state and community partners, I am confident that we can meet these commitments.

As always, I appreciate this opportunity to speak before you today. I would be happy to address any questions or concerns you may have.

