

Appropriations Committee
Deficiency Hearing
March 23, 2010

Testimony of Brian K Murphy, Acting Commissioner
Department of Correction

Good afternoon, Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, and members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Brian K. Murphy, Acting Commissioner of the Department of Correction. I am joined today by Chairman Robert Farr of the Board of Pardons and Paroles, and Dr. Robert Trestman, representing our health care contractor, the University of Connecticut, Correctional Managed Health Care.

As I begin, I would like to inform you that the Department continues to operate in a safe, secure and orderly manner. The incarcerated population today stands at about 18,300, a reduction of 700 compared to last year.

When I came before you in November the Department was facing a deficit projection of \$21.5 million dollars. Since then my staff have kept my promise to you, to take every opportunity to reduce our expenses; and to achieve any efficiencies that are possible without jeopardizing safety and security.

Since November our deficit projection has improved with each passing month. The gross figure now stands at \$18.8 million dollars. In fact, our savings are greater than that figure reflects, as I will detail further.

As stated in my previous testimony, levels of cooperation and improved communications by criminal justice agencies that have taken place over the last two years are working, and improving public safety.

Population management, reentry initiatives and community supervision have all improved through the efforts of our criminal justice and community partners.

I am especially proud to acknowledge the professional staff of the Department of Correction. It is through their diligence that we continue to provide safe, secure and efficient custody of the inmate population, as well as effective supervision of a growing number of offenders in the community.

In addition, the efforts of the Governor and this Legislature have allowed us to increase the number of offenders supervised in the community, as well as the number who experience a managed reentry process through our reentry furlough program.

As the inmate population has decreased, we were able to take the significant step of closing the Webster Correctional Institution. We estimate that this step will save about 1 million dollars this year and about 3.4 million next year.

We continue to work with the Office of Policy and Management to utilize stimulus funding, we are expanding video conferencing to reduce transportation expenses and facilitate hearings. Federal funds are now also supporting improved DNA testing, infectious disease control and improvements in our parole caseload management system.

Despite our concerted efforts, though, there are two areas in which we are forced to project cost overruns this year.

In Other Expenses, we anticipate a shortfall of \$11.8 million. This is an improvement of over \$5 million compared to November, and our efforts to reduce this figure continue.

We continue to pursue Energy Conservation in the areas of lighting efficiency, water conservation, HVAC and ventilation upgrades.

In Food Services we are providing a nutritious and economical menu, while seeking savings through opportunity buys and prompt payment discounts.

In Worker's Compensation, a 50% increase in medical costs has driven our deficit estimate to \$7 million. This is in spite of a 15% decline in the number of DOC employees out on active injuries.

With the cost of medical care increasing, we are putting our best efforts into avoiding new cases and bringing injured staff back to work where appropriate. This year we have collaborated with the AFSCME NP-4 bargaining unit and DAS to create Light Duty positions at each facility to bring staff who are not physically able to perform normal duties back to work sooner. Nearly 100 employees have participated in this program already.

As a final note, I would like to point out that in the key area of overtime expenses; we have been able to reduce our overtime this year by 180,000 hours compared to the same period last year. This has occurred even with the retirements of more than 400 of our most senior, experienced staff. As a result our projected personal services cost this year is now \$7m lower than our estimate in September.

Combining this and other surplus amounts that result from our efforts to reduce expenditures, our net shortfall this year is reduced to just under \$8.9 million dollars. With assistance from OPM in making transfers and releasing holdbacks, the Department will be able to meet its budget target this year.

Through the end of this fiscal year, and as the next year approaches, my staff and I will continue to aggressively control expenses.

Please be assured that we will maintain our commitment to finding efficiencies and cost reductions while insuring the safety of the public, our staff and the inmate population.

I appreciate this opportunity to speak with you today, and I would be happy to answer your questions.

