

Department of Correction

Testimony of James Dzurenda, South District Administrator and Dan Callahan, Director of Human Resources

Labor and Public Employees Committee

Raised Bill No. 5063, *AAC Light Duty Work in the Department of Correction*

February 23, 2010

Good afternoon Senator Prague, Representative Ryan and members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. I am James Dzurenda, South District Administrator of the Department of Correction (DOC), and joining me is Dan Callahan, Director of Human Resources. We are here this afternoon to speak to Raised Bill No. 5063, *An Act Concerning Light Duty in the Department of Correction*.

Let me begin by stating that the administration of the DOC takes the health and well being of its employees seriously and strongly supports the return of its employees to light duty positions. So strongly in fact, that it implemented a Light Duty Program in November 2009. The DOC believes that a statutory requirement to establish a Light Duty Program is neither necessary nor needed.

In collaboration with AFSCME NP-4 and the Department of Administrative Services, the DOC enhanced its current Recuperative Post program, which is designed to transition injured employees back to full duty with the creation of Light Duty positions at each of the agency's 17 facilities. The Light Duty program is designed to afford employees who are out of work due to a filed Workers' Compensation claim that prevents the employee from performing the full range of duties of their position and is utilized as an alternative for employees who, based on their medical provider's notes and departmental standards, cannot meet the requirements of a recuperative post assignment or return to full duty. Light Duty assignments are offered to an employee for a 60-day period and will serve as a transition for return to full duty or to a recuperative post assignment. A 30-day extension may be offered after a review of the employee's medical status in certain cases. A combination of Light Duty and Recuperative assignments will not exceed a total of 150 days in any injury case.

Information about the program has been distributed to all DOC employees and is available at all facilities and in many units either through Human Resources or the Warden's office. Since its implementation late last year, 86 employees have been through the new Light Duty program. Of those, 28 are back at full or recuperative posts, 39 are currently in light duty posts, and 19 employees had recurrence of their injury and went back out on Workers' Compensation.

In addition to the Light Duty Program, there is a five-year DOC-approved federally funded research project through the University of Connecticut concerning ergonomic and muscular-skeletal injuries of correctional staff. Now in its third year, the study, which, we believe, is the first of its kind in the country, is specifically designed towards researching correctional employee health. Currently the main study areas are at the Cheshire Correctional Institution and Corrigan-Radgowski Correctional Center. Pilot programs are fully underway at both locations to examine different approaches and programs that can help improve the health of correctional employees. Additionally, NP-4 members also have been provided with \$100,000 in each contract for stress reduction. These funds have supported the development of fitness areas at a

number of facilities, with space provided by the DOC, and the purchasing of equipment designed to help reduce workforce injury and stress.

Again, the DOC does not believe the passage of Raised Bill 5063 is necessary. The agency is already making light duty work available for eligible employees. Thank you for the opportunity to present the Department's views on this matter. We'll be happy to answer any questions you may have.