

**Appropriations Committee
Deficiency Hearing
November 15, 2010
Testimony of
Leo C. Arnone, Commissioner
Department of Correction**

Good morning Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Leo Arnone. I am the Commissioner of the Department of Correction.

I am proud to come before you today in my new role as Commissioner of the Department of Correction. A lot has changed since I left the Department in 1995 after 21 years with the agency, beginning as a front line officer. The Department I returned to this summer is bigger, more complex, and better organized to manage the challenges of today's justice system. The staff remains highly professional, and I can assure you that our correctional facilities continue to operate in a safe, secure and orderly manner.

In response to the state's fiscal constraints the agency over the course of the past three years has dedicated itself to controlling costs. The Department has sought efficiencies, consolidations and has controlled expenditures in virtually every area.

Overall last year Other Expense costs were \$11 million lower than the previous year. In Personal Services, despite a reduction of 450 filled positions, we were able to control overtime and save \$27 million compared to FY09.

I was impressed to learn that the cost to feed each inmate daily is significantly lower today than it was when I left in 1994; it is now one of the lowest per day costs in the nation at approximately \$2.50.

A recent report by the VERA Institute of Justice noted food cost, and energy efficiency as areas where other Correction Departments are finding savings, as we already have. It also found that among 44 Departments surveyed in the report, Connecticut experienced the second highest reduction in its Corrections appropriation from Fiscal Year '09 to Fiscal Year '2010. We achieved a 7.6% reduction as compared to New York's 9.5%, which was the highest reported. The report also cited our use of Stimulus funds to collaborate with the Board of Pardons and Paroles and the Judicial Department to further expand the use of videoconferencing, to expedite case processing, improve security, and reduce expenses.

When it comes to the cost of running a prison system, though, the size of the inmate population drives expenses. The population today stands at about 18,300, a reduction of more than 300 compared to a year ago. We were able to take advantage of declining population last year by closing Webster Correctional Institution, and we have restored the level of offenders supervised in the community, but the population decline of the past two years has slowed.

While we will continue to limit purchasing to essential goods and services, today I must acknowledge that we project a deficit in Other Expenses of \$12 million dollars this year. After our success in reducing Other Expenses by 13% last year, our current budget calls for us to achieve an additional \$9.2m reduction in the current year.

In reality, I do not anticipate that we will be able to hold the expenditure level we achieved last year. Utility costs make up 45% of OE expenditures, and a mild winter in FY10 contributed to our savings. We will continue, however, to actively pursue energy conservation projects that may further reduce utility costs. An additional 25% of our OE expenses will go solely to food for inmates, an area in which we are already very aggressive in seeking savings opportunities and discounts. Purchasing constraints have depleted our stock of materials and supplies, and repair and maintenance work that was deferred last year has now become essential.

While we have restricted General Fund expenditures, the Department has been active in utilizing Federal funds in a variety of projects that will improve operations, reentry programming, and efficiency. With assistance from the Office of Policy and Management, we are using stimulus funds to continue expansion of video conferencing. New video capacity is already coming on line, allowing more inmates to participate in hearings and other proceedings without leaving a secure facility. This technology reduces staffing and transportation costs and improves public safety as the inmate never has to leave the correctional facility.

We have completed updating DNA testing, again with Federal assistance, so that all felony offenders are tested on admission to our facilities. Progress is being made on improving our Parole caseload management system, and we recently won Second Chance Act support for expanded reentry programming in the New Haven area. Through efforts like these we are able to improve our community correctional systems and become more efficient without increasing our reliance on appropriated funding.

I can assure you that our Correction staff understands the severity of the financial situation we are experiencing. We will continue to seek efficiencies and savings throughout our operation.

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