



STATE OF CONNECTICUT

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**Testimony of Michelle Cruz, Esq., State Victim Advocate
Submitted to the Appropriations Committee
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Good afternoon Senator Harp, Representative Walker and distinguished members of the Appropriations Committee. For the record, my name is Michelle Cruz and I am the Victim Advocate for the State of Connecticut. Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony concerning:

**Senate Bill No. 378, AN ACT CONCERNING EXPEDITURES OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION**

The Office of the Victim Advocate (OVA) supports the initiative for reviewing and evaluating programs to ensure that the money appropriated to particular programs is meeting the expectations of the programming. Results based accounting is the fiscally responsible manner in which to operate an agency. Senate Bill No. 378 will require the Department of Correction to review and evaluate the programs administered by the Department of Correction (DOC) and assign priority for the continued funding of such programs.

At last count, there were over four hundred programs available to an inmate in the custody of the Commissioner of Correction; the availability of programs varies at each facility. Public Act No. 11-51, in part, established the risk reduction earned credit program and allows an inmate to earn up to five days a month off the end of their sentence for participation in eligible programs and activities, good conduct and work assignments. The OVA, in reviewing information from the DOC, has learned that many inmates must be placed on a waiting list for many program opportunities. Placement on a waiting list has been interpreted by the DOC as "participation in programs" for purposes of granting an inmate risk reduction credits.

The OVA is genuinely concerned that this review of programs and assignment of priority for continued funding will impact the availability of programs, as the programs will ultimately be reduced for cost saving purposes, create longer waiting lists for programs, while at the same time, allow inmates to earn risk reduction credits for "program participation." It is not realistic for the DOC to evaluate the cost-effectiveness and benefits of such programs, more than 400, within six months.

Additionally, the current process for tracking recidivism among offenders does not take into consideration the offender's program participation while incarcerated. Rather, the measurement is based on the offender's re-entry strategy, whether it be an

early release to a halfway house, early release to parole supervision or other early release reentry process. Clearly, the early release reentry model is designed to focus on an offender's successful transition after incarceration. However, the current recidivism rates are limited to the early release method and not the impact of programming while incarcerated.

Finally, the Victim Services Unit (VSU) within the Department of Correction provides a valuable and life-saving service to victims of crime. Victims of crime may register with the VSU to receive confidential notification of an inmate's status. The notification includes the release of an inmate on bond in pre-conviction cases through the end of sentence release of a convicted inmate. In 2005, the VSU was established (C.S.G. § 18-78b) to ensure that registered victims of crime, and others, receive timely and accurate notification of an inmate's status. Since that time, the VSU has seen a steady decrease in staffing and resources. The VSU is maintained and operated with only two assigned employees and more than one-thousand three hundred registrants. Considering the vast amount of resources from the DOC's budget that is dedicated solely to an inmate's early release and reentry process, the cost-effective benefit of the VSU must not be understated or the target of further cost saving measures.

I urge the Committee to amend the proposal to provide the DOC enough time to properly evaluate its programs; six months is just not realistic.

Thank you for consideration of my testimony.

Respectfully submitted,



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