

**Testimony of  
Leo C. Arnone, Commissioner  
Department of Correction**

**Appropriations Committee  
February 22, 2012**

Good afternoon Senator Harp, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. My name is Leo Arnone. I am the Commissioner of the Department of Correction. Chair Erika Tindall of the Board of Pardons and Paroles joins me today.

The Governor's budget proposal for the Department of Correction reflects the economic challenge we face throughout the state. Despite the difficult fiscal environment I am confident that we can continue to reassess and reconfigure the Agency so that we can ensure the protection of our citizens. In addition, we will provide offenders with opportunity and incentive to rehabilitate themselves and redirect their lives. We will continue our efforts to seek out and adopt evidence-based practices to improve outcomes and enhance safety and security. We will continue to expand and enhance communication and collaboration with our judicial, law enforcement, social services, and community partners and we will continue to employ disciplined, intelligent fiscal policy and controls to maximize the resources we have available.

The fiscal constraints of the past several years have posed great challenges to all of us, but they have also provided us with an opportunity to re-examine every aspect of how we go about executing our missions and to make critical changes that will redefine the business of correction in our state. In today's fiscal environment, "good enough" is just not "good enough" anymore. We can do better and I am pleased to say that we are doing better.

This budget continues the work we started last year in reforming Connecticut's criminal justice system and reducing recidivism in an efficient, effective, and fiscally responsible manner. With the support of the Governor, the legislature, judicial branch, sister agencies, community partners and the hard working men and women of the Department of

Correction, I am confident that the initiatives we have begun implementing will have a significant, positive impact on the overall offender population.

As I have mentioned to you in past hearings, inmate population drives the costs of the prison system. Fewer inmates lead to lower costs. However, in order to realize these cost savings from population reductions, we need to achieve certain thresholds. These thresholds occur when the inmate population is reduced enough to close either housing units within a facility or an entire facility. I am encouraged by the continued decline in our inmate population and am hopeful that our efforts will ultimately lead to a smaller, more cost effective correction department.

We estimate to achieve annualized savings from the closing of the Gates and Bergin facilities of \$17.8 million. Additional savings of \$6.2 million will accrue from placing transferred custody staff into vacant slots covered by overtime. These savings are temporarily offset by the reconfiguration of the remaining facilities to manage the current population level. We anticipate reducing overflow posts as the offender population continues to decline upon which we can realize the total savings from the closures.

The passage of P.A. 11-51 granted me the authority to implement several new efforts to reduce our offender population and to reduce recidivism. Over the course of the past several months we have been working diligently to put into practice these important new programs.

In September of last year we began the implementation of the Risk Reduction Earned Credit initiative. Since this time, the Department has seen a decrease in the inmate population of approximately 600 inmates. This reduction is largely a result of this initiative. In addition, we have seen an increase in participation rates in those programs that allow for the earning of credit including educational, behavioral and addiction programs. Furthermore, we have seen a decrease in behaviors that would prohibit those same earnings including inmate-on-staff assaults, inmate-on-inmate assaults, and possession of contraband. I am confident that these preliminary signs are an indication of a successful program.

P.A. 11-51 also authorizes me to implement a home confinement program for persons convicted of driving under the influence. Given this new authority, DOC has had to create a comprehensive strategy for assessment, a plan for programming, and many aspects of how to manage

home confinement. All of these efforts are in process and we anticipate implementation of the home confinement initiative by the end of this month.

Through collaboration with the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services and the Judicial Branch, we have seen offenders appropriately diverted from the Correctional system. For those offenders entering, we can control how we manage and position them for a successful re-entry to society. The science tells us that releasing people to supervision in the community toward the end of their sentences reduces recidivism. To fully reap the benefits of this approach and mitigate the inherent risks, the state has to do a better job in screening and assessing inmates for release. To this end we are preparing to adopt a new risk-assessment tool that can better predict an inmate's tendency to comply with the terms of their parole/release. This new tool, which is used effectively by several other states, can measure how much an inmate has changed while in prison and is more sensitive than the current method in picking up attitudes of non-compliance.

The Board of Pardons and Paroles is undergoing an organizational restructure, which once fully implemented, will drive necessary change and improvement at the agency. Reduced staffing levels will facilitate the decrease of \$304,122.00 in the Board's FY2013 appropriation. The Board remains committed to streamlining with a flatter organizational structure and a focus on improving our most critical public services.

We continue with our efforts to implement a new Offender Management Information System. A key component of justice information sharing, it will provide dramatic efficiencies, allow us to share information and analysis that we could not provide in the past, and do it faster. It will also incorporate community supervision information, and tie in with other state, local and federal justice agencies.

Through January we have reduced overtime by \$2.0 million dollars compared to the same period last year. We have initiated numerous cost saving efforts such as the expansion of the central transportation unit for more efficient inmate transport with both court and hospital transports. We have recently closed two facilities and redeployed staff throughout the system, reducing the immediate need for new hires resulting in lower personal services costs. Additionally we have made changes in our

healthcare delivery system which will not only result in cost savings but will lead to better care and better health outcomes for our inmates.

Unfortunately, next fiscal year the Department we will face more economic challenges. We are hopeful however that the initiatives we have put in place along with plans to re-assign inmates more appropriately in facilities and our continued declining population will help us to further control overtime costs and therefore be better able to manage our budget. New efforts are underway to revitalize DOC's treatment and programming, education, and vocation training divisions and we have created a new promising partnership with the Connecticut Business and Industry Association.

I have challenged all of the Department of Correction to continue to explore ways in which we can lower the costs of the state's prison system. The only condition on that directive is that cost saving measures must maintain or enhance safety and security and they must maintain or improve outcomes for our inmates, DOC staff, our host communities, and the people of Connecticut. It is a tall order but we have already demonstrated that it can be done. I fully intend to build upon the successes we have achieved.

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