

Council 4 AFSCME Testimony for HB 5247

AN ACT CONCERNING THE PENALTY FOR ASSAULT OF PUBLIC SAFETY, EMERGENCY MEDICAL, PUBLIC TRANSIT OR HEALTH CARE PERSONNEL.

Public Safety Committee – February 28, 2012

Good afternoon, Chairman Hartley and Chairman Dargan. My name is Lisamarie Fontano. I am president of Local 387, Cheshire Correction Employees. Our union, along with AFSCME Locals 391 and 1565, represents nearly 5,000 front-line prison employees.

I am also speaking on behalf of Council 4 AFSCME, a union of 35,000 public and private employees.

Council 4 supports House Bill 5247, AN ACT CONCERNING THE PENALTY FOR ASSAULT OF PUBLIC SAFETY, EMERGENCY MEDICAL, PUBLIC TRANSIT OR HEALTH CARE PERSONNEL. This bill would establish a two year mandatory minimum penalty for assaulting a correction officer or employee.

Over the years there have been numerous serious assaults on correction officers. We believe that this bill will serve as a meaningful deterrent to inmates who contemplate assaulting an officer.

We have seen situations where inmates have received minimal punishment for an assault of a correction employee. The recent legislative task force on correction staff safety drew attention to this problem. Consequently, some progress is being made in prosecuting such assaults. Yet, it is the belief of our members that this new law is necessary. It sends a clear, impossible to miss, message to inmates – “You will serve an additional two years in prison if you attack a correction officer or employee.”

According to the Legislative Program Review and Investigations Committee, corrections front line staff is about 20 percent short of what it should be. Not all of our members have up to date radios to keep them safe. Passing this bill gives the state a tool to bring down the number of assaults. It will cut down on workers’ compensation costs and trauma to staff.

This bill also extends this protection to specified Department of Children and Families and Judicial Department members. They regularly come under threat and have experienced numerous assaults over the years.

We urge you to vote for this bill. I would be happy to answer any questions.