

**Appropriations Committee  
February 19, 2013  
Testimony of  
Leo C. Arnone, Commissioner  
Department of Correction**

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

The Governor's biennium budget proposal for the Department of Correction is lean, but given the current and projected fiscal outlook for our state, it is more than fair. This budget will require us to moderate our efforts to modernize our systems and facilities and adjust the timelines of such efforts. However, we are confident that with the support of the Governor, the Legislature, the Judicial Branch, sister agencies, community partners and the hard-working men and women of the Department of Correction we can and will continue to make real progress toward a leaner and more cost efficient corrections system in Connecticut.

We have been able to stem the growth of the Department, maintain, and in many instances reduce our costs and move our agency firmly toward a model that recognizes and emphasizes rehabilitation as the key to reducing our incarcerated population over time.

Despite the fiscal challenges of the past several years the department has increased the availability of evidence based programs that have been shown to reduce recidivism among participants. This was made possible through a comprehensive effort we began last year to revitalize our management and delivery of treatment programs, education, and vocational training. As part of this ongoing effort we reorganized our Programs and Treatment division by deploying reentry staff into each facility to provide critical services that have the propensity to save dollars, not only for the DOC, but for sister agencies and community partners as well. Additionally the DOC, in partnership with the Board of Pardons and Paroles, is in the process of implementing a Statewide Collaborative Offender Risk Evaluation System (SCORES) that will improve the way program assignments are made and further enhance efficiencies in the provision of services with the ultimate goal of achieving successful inmate outcomes. Evidence shows that successful outcomes lead to lower rates of recidivism and it is reductions in recidivism that will, over time, result in a lower inmate population, which in turn will result in a lower cost Department of Correction.

The DOC firmly believes that an important component in successful inmate reentry is access to healthcare. To this end, and in preparation for full implementation of the Affordable Care Act, the Department in conjunction with DSS, has begun work on several initiatives designed to improve access to Medicaid for releasing inmates.

In addition, we have expanded our Mental Health Parole Unit to provide additional supervision for more mental health as well as certain medically ill parolees. We also expanded a new Short-term Respite program modeled after our successful longstanding Time Out Program. This program within our Mental Health Parole unit provides for short-term intensive mental health or medical intervention for parolees who are doing poorly in order to maintain them in the community rather than return them to prison or jail.

Additionally we continue to review our systems for opportunities to improve our performance and to more effectively and efficiently utilize our resources. These efforts have resulted in numerous structural

changes to our business model that should begin to yield cost efficiencies in the coming fiscal years, such as a redistribution of inmates from higher cost confinement to a lower cost confinement.

As we have mentioned in past testimony, the Department's expenditures are driven by the level of the supervised inmate population, which dictates the size of our physical plant, staffing levels, utility costs, maintenance expenses, inmate food, clothing, and other supply costs. Overtime, the aging of our facilities and the rising cost of food and utilities continue to be a source of concern for us.

Reducing overtime remains a challenge. The Department's correctional facilities run 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. These facilities need to maintain certain staffing levels to ensure the safety and security of Connecticut's citizens, DOC staff, and the inmates committed to our care and custody. As you may know, in the early 1990's, DOC experienced a large and rapid expansion with nine prisons opening between 1990 and 1995. Hazardous duty staff hired prior to July 1, 2011 is eligible to retire after 20 years of hazardous duty service. Many hazardous duty staff hired during this expansion are now, or will soon become, eligible to retire and as a result DOC is currently experiencing a great deal of turnover which is expected to last another two to three years. This high rate of attrition has made it very difficult to keep staffing levels at the amount needed to dramatically impact overtime. Currently vacancies make up approximately 50% of DOC's overtime costs.

As you know, the costs of goods and services have been rising with food and energy costs greater than that of overall inflation. The latest Consumer Price Index for food items projects annual percentage increases between 3.0 to 4.5% during 2013. Currently we feed approximately 17,000 inmates per day totaling 19.3 million meals per year. Our Food Service Unit has worked diligently to keep costs down by working with its vendor to decrease the mark up on food by 2.50%, by aggressively taking advantage of opportunity buys and by utilizing inmate labor to revitalize in-house baking for an additional savings of over \$2.1 million. Additionally DOC has been expanding its inmate farming programs that have increased the use of fresh produce without increasing overall food cost. However, even with these and other efforts, the continued rising cost of food has increased our per day meal cost by 9.43%.

With regard to Workers' Compensation costs I am pleased to report that Active Workers' Compensation lost time cases decreased from 207 in August 2009 to 102 in June 2012. DOC's efforts to lower its workers' compensation costs have resulted in significant cost savings in the Agency's worker's compensation budget and represents a successful joint initiative between the AFSCME union and the Agency.

Despite the difficult fiscal environment I am confident that this budget will allow us to fulfill our mission and continue the progress we have made in revitalizing our re-entry services. We will continue to 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 also continue to expand and enhance communication and collaboration with our judicial, law enforcement, social services, and community partners. Lastly, we will continue to employ disciplined, intelligent fiscal policy and controls to maximize the resources we have available.

Please know that we remain committed to controlling costs and pursuing efficiencies, where possible, while continuing our primary mission of maintaining a safe, professional, and efficient correctional system.

I appreciate this opportunity to speak with you today and now Chair Tindall will present her testimony.