

March 11, 2013

Testimony of Douglas Hood, in favor of H.B. 6581

My name is Douglas Hood. Thank you for the opportunity to testify.

I have been at York, the only women's prison in CT, teaching writing for a couple years. We have about twelve women in our class. Most looking at 15 to 50 years. Most were young. They come from projects, parents missing. Family might be a gang or a foster home.

You see our class is like an attorney's office or a hospital M&M conference. What is said in that room stays there. Voices are true, free. I've heard stories of self-mockery, the mean streets, seeing children grow up in the visiting area. You'd think they'd be cagey about their past. But they're not. Nothing that makes them scary. We've laughed, clapped, and cried. Hugs aren't allowed.

You'd expect them to be bitter. They're not. Some tell me coming to York was the best thing that happened to them. They wake up and fill their day. They joke about their life, the bugs, the slop, the searches, how they cook with a hair dryer, find make-up on door hinges. Since most never finished school you'd think they'd waste away in front of a TV or just sit and complain. But they're doing all they can, taking courses, mentoring new inmates. You'd think they'd suffocate on that one mistake, the what if's. I never hear it. Instead there's optimism about a day they walk out, free. In reality there is no such day. Unless you count getting out at 65 a free pass.

Some guys who've been in prison are here today. Straightforward and honest. Not pretending to be what they aren't. Still go by felon and ex-con. Still have a bullet in their lung. When you've been law-abiding like me, that's scary--until you talk to them. They're making up for lost time. Paying back, even though they already did that. These guys—and our women, if they get out—will find that guy or girl that looks like just them and save him from going the same path. They do it for no payback, no awards, no kudos--just doing what's right. That's what we're asking you, do what's right.

In one way I'm like these guys--I'm not a politico. I'm here because I know some women at York very well that aren't getting a fair shake. They need a chance. Most never got a first shot.