

**Appropriations Committee
February 19, 2016
Testimony of
S. Scott Semple, Commissioner
Department of Correction**

Good afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Walker, and members of the Appropriations Committee. I am Scott Semple, Commissioner of the Department of Correction. Chair Carleton J. Giles of the Board of Pardons and Paroles joins me today.

The Governor's budget proposal for the Department of Correction will be a challenge, however, given the state's current and projected fiscal situation we are preparing to take on this challenge.

To live within available resources we need to responsibly decrease our inmate population, we need to achieve greater structural efficiencies and we need to affect and achieve better outcomes. We have been working towards achieving these objectives and by focusing on our core services and maintaining our emphasis on reducing recidivism, I believe we can effectively achieve a more affordable budget position.

Over the past several years we have examined all aspects of our business model for opportunities to improve offender outcomes, increase operational efficiencies, reduce costs and improve and enhance safety and security for the citizens of Connecticut. The Department has adopted a strategic plan and process through which we have begun requiring appropriate performance data to be collected, analyzed and acted on. The plan identifies three overarching goals which are overlapping and interconnected. We are using this plan to not only guide our decision making but to form the standard in which all of the agency's actions, policies, efforts and initiatives exist. The three overarching goals are:

Public Safety: Reduce Recidivism and Prevent Criminal Activity in our Community and be an active partner in the state's criminal justice, public safety and emergency response/disaster relief systems.

Wellness: Reduce Trauma and its effects throughout the system.

Efficiency: Maximize the utility of limited resources, increase and enhance collaboration, productivity and efficiencies and achieve operational and procedural consistency between DOC facilities and between DOC and its partners.

Despite the difficult fiscal conditions of the past several years and utilizing the Strategic Plan as our guide, we have been able to reduce overtime by 10% over last fiscal year. We have been able to make key investments in modernizing our systems with the start of the implementation of both a new Offender Management Information System and an Electronic Health Care System. We have embraced Lean which is empowering staff to identify and implement process improvements. Our staff are our most valuable and important asset and Lean is proving to be an excellent means of leveraging this asset. We have established within the department the Office of Strategic Planning, Analysis, Research and Compliance (SPARC) to ensure that this process and our lean initiative are sustained and capitalized upon.

Last session the legislature enacted the Governor's Second Chance Society legislation, which as you know is designed to keep individuals from entering or re-entering the criminal justice system and by breaking the cycle of crime and poverty.

The Governor's Second Chance Society initiative is a logical extension of where the Department of Correction has been heading over the past few years. By reducing the impediments offenders face returning to the community, I am confident that we will be making a lasting positive impact on the rate of recidivism in the state.

In support of this initiative, we introduced several changes to our business model which have begun to sharpen our focus as a Department and is allowing us to position ourselves as a smaller, more flexible and more community-orientated Department of Correction.

In April of last year we created the Cybulski Community Reintegration Center Reintegration at the Willard-Cybulski Correctional Institution in Enfield. Within a safe, secure and humane environment, offenders participate in a meaningful program process that instills a high standard of accountability and an expectation of responsibility on the part of the offender. Privileges and awards are earned and any offender who fails to meet the set standards will engage in a process of corrective action. Within the counseling and programming services of this facility, offenders also have an opportunity to address the causes and issues that brought them into incarceration. On February 1st, we opened a Reintegration Center at the York Correctional Institution, our women's facility in Niantic and we are planning on establishing one at the Manson Youth Institution in Cheshire as well as a hybrid model that will be designed for the mental health population.

The more worth you add to individuals under our supervision through passionate facilitation of counseling services, education, training, and support services the greater value you provide to the communities in the form of productive and contributing members of society.

We know Risk Reduction Earned Credit (RREC) has increased program participation and helped to reduce the instances of offender on staff and offender on offender assaults. We believe that it could have a greater impact with the recently enacted modifications to RREC and how it is administered by the agency. We have aligned the program with our existing objective classification system to promote positive, constructive behavior and engagement. An offender at a high security level would not receive the full statutory benefit of RREC as much as offenders who are or have gradually transitioned to lower or minimum security levels. However, through an extended period of compliant behavior an offender may progress to a lower security level and earn proportionately more RREC. The revised structure is intended to motivate offenders with higher security risk levels to

engage in programming and positive behavior in order to reduce their risk levels, and receive more earned credits. With offenders motivated to comply with institutional rules, this new policy has the added benefit of enhancing overall safety.

The Department has supported and partners with several non-profit agencies to maximize existing funding and coordinate innovative rehabilitative and reintegration programs. An example is the "AJC at Whalley" program under which the Department provides space at the New Haven Correctional Center for a non-profit (Workforce Alliance) for an American Job Center. The Center will provide federal grant-funded employment readiness training as well as job search capacity for inmates from the area who are nearing a release from custody.

We are working to enhance our educational services. There is solid evidence that links education with reduced recidivism. The Department employs 118 teachers and 33 vocational instructors in its Unified School District #1 to serve the needs of a population that is assessed to need English as a second language, adult basic education, GED preparation and job skills training across a wide variety of fields.

In March of last year we centralized all community release decision making with the creation of a Community Release Unit which has streamlined the decision making process and has improved the consistency and quality of release decisions. I note that this change was the result of Lean.

With the anticipated decrease in offender population within our facilities, there will be a corresponding increase in the number of offenders who are supervised in the community. It is essential that we recalibrate our organization to deal with this anticipated shift and prepare our workforce for the change in focus. To this end we have begun reorganizing our parole supervision function to adjust to the changing correctional paradigm. For example, this past fiscal year we completed a restructuring of the Parole and Community Services Division's Residential Services Unit to ensure a more efficient use of its

contracted halfway house bed network and enable a more consistent presence by parole officers in these programs.

This is just some of what we have been doing and I note that we have accomplished all of this within our available appropriations.

As you know the Governor is proposing another set of criminal justice reforms to further tackle the cycle of crime and poverty and ensure that Connecticut's already extraordinarily low crime rate continue to drop. As stated by the Governor, these changes are rooted in a belief that our corrections system should be about just that – corrections. Our jails should not be crime schools, particularly for our youngest, most impressionable offenders. We know that the longer we keep young people out of the adult criminal justice system, the less likely they are to ever become incarcerated again.

Research continues to show that young adult brains are not fully developed until age 25. When young people make bad decisions, the trajectory of their lives can change permanently. The Department is in the planning stages of a first-in-the-nation plan to house and treat offenders' ages 18 to 25 in a separate re-purposed correctional facility or section of an existing facility. The facility for younger offenders will involve specialized training for staff and curriculum for inmates that reflects our evolving knowledge about brain development.

In addition, the Department has received a substantial Second Chance Act grant from the United States Department of Justice which will facilitate the development of a state-wide criminal justice strategic plan for the purpose of substantially impacting the rate of recidivism. Implementation funds may be available to execute portions of the plan.

I am confident that the other aspects of the Governor's Second Chance 2.0 reforms as it relates to youthful offenders (a phased in raise the age of the juvenile justice system's jurisdiction and allowing low-risk offenders aged 18 through 20 to be tried as young adults rather than the an adult and limiting the period of incarceration to not extend beyond four

years) will provide us with a real opportunity to keep individuals from entering the criminal justice system and from entering the cycle of crime and poverty. To complement the Governor's proposals, I believe this is a real opportunity to truly stem the flow of individuals into the system and make a generational impact.

I am also confident that the Governor's proposal regarding bail reform will ensure that the state is not housing low-risk offenders after arrest simply because they cannot afford bail. This proposal will have a significant impact on the population level of our jails and help us to achieve a smaller footprint.

In order to continue to make the necessary adjustments to our business model within the proposed budget, we need to prioritize funding for core services and concentrate our efforts and our resources to fulfill 4 primary areas:

- Incarceration and Supervision
- Rehabilitation and Education
- Reentry
- Recidivism Reduction

To fulfill our services we will need to:

- Maintain safe and secure facilities;
- Improve wellness by reducing trauma and its effects throughout the system;
- Maximize the utility of limited resources, enhance collaboration, productivity and efficiencies and achieve operational and procedural consistency between DOC facilities and its partners; and
- Reduce the cost of Connecticut's Correctional System while enhancing outcomes and reducing recidivism

To achieve these objectives we intend to:

- Control overtime usage and refill positions on a needed basis only.
- Reduce the utilization of sick time and workers compensation by staff

- Increase the health and wellbeing of both inmates and staff to lead to lower health care cost.
- Continue to employ "lean" to streamline processes and procedures and leverage technology to create efficiencies and enhance communication.
- Use data to drive decision making and to improve outcomes by measuring the performance of agency programs, policies and initiatives and by employing evidence based offender management and rehabilitation/reentry practices.

The Governor has proposed changing the state's "current services" approach to establishing agency budgets. He has proposed giving agency heads more flexibility in determining how resources are applied and funds managed. The state's fiscal situation dictates that we continue to be efficient and effective with every dollar. Giving agency heads greater oversight and control of the resources they have to work with will provide us with the means and flexibility to adjust to rapidly changing demands and allow us to more effectively meet our operational needs and to fulfill our policy objectives. We are in a period of extreme transition and rapid transformation. The ability to quickly adjust our spending and our approach to fulfilling our core services is important to our ability to meet our responsibilities and obligations in a time of significant budgetary constraint.

My expectation is to work closely with the Governor and legislators on setting policy priorities and agency performance expectations in the most timely and cost effective manner. I fully expect to be held accountable for the decisions I make and for the performance of the agency in meeting the Governor's and your expectations.

I believe that with this added authority comes the responsibility for transparency and the obligation of accountability. I understand that I will be required to demonstrate, in clear terms and in a timely manner, my agency's performance in meeting expectations and in achieving desired outcomes.

I firmly recognize the fiscal realities we face as a state and the budget constraints we face as an agency. I am 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 and towards a real and permanent reduction in the rate of recidivism in our state.

The department is dedicated to honoring the rights of crime victims and to making sure that high-risk offenders receive proper oversight and interventions as we continue our efforts to impact recidivism which correlates to lowering crime. We will continue to strive to fulfill our mission.

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