

Good Afternoon Senators Gomes and Minor, Representatives Porter and Bocchino and the members of the Labor and Public Employees Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to provide you with testimony regarding **House Bill 6219, An Act Concerning Community Reentry By Persons Who Were Incarcerated**. My name is Scott Semple and I am the Commissioner of the Department of Correction

I am grateful for the interest shown by the Labor Committee in the employment challenges of Ex-Offenders. The Department of Correction knows that employment is key to reducing the recidivism of ex-offenders and restoring them to the ranks of lawful taxpayers. In one of my first acts as Commissioner, I sat down with Peter Gioia, Vice President and Economist of the CT Business and Industry Association to identify growing employment sectors to focus DOC's vocational training efforts. We have been actively engaging the employer community throughout the state to encourage them to hire ex-offenders. In particular, DOC has worked closely with UniMetal in Thomaston which is a Surface Finishing company. It has hired approximately 12 former inmates. Most of its hires have come from recommendations from DOC's Unified School District #1 and many of its hires are former USD #1 students who have attended and/or completed one of our school district vocational programs. Additionally, Masterson's in Bloomfield is one of the other companies that has worked with us to hire ex-offenders and is now hiring ex-offenders from halfway houses.

Under Governor Malloy's leadership, the Department has also established several Reintegration Centers to assist inmates in making a successful transition back into the community by providing education, training, and job readiness skills. And these efforts have achieved results: the Cybulski Community Reintegration Center's recidivism rate is less than half of the statewide return rate. This past semester, DOC worked with Asnuntuck Community College in Enfield to allow pre-screened Willard-Cybulski inmates the opportunity to attend the Manufacturing Program at Asnuntuck CC, which has an outstanding statewide reputation. The Manufacturing Program at ACC prepares students for a career in manufacturing by providing classroom instruction, computer, and hands-on training in a lab environment. Students attended the college for the hands-on portion and then received classroom instruction at Willard-Cybulski. Through this program, students are able to earn a one-year certificate or a two-year associate's degree, and they place 9 out of 10 graduates within 3 months. Some inmates who were attending ACC while incarcerated and then who discharged have been able to continue in this program on the outside.

Connecticut DOC is a national leader in providing Pell Grant college classes for inmates using professors from Asnuntuck, Middlesex, Three Rivers and Quinebaug Valley Community Colleges. Pell classes have impacted approximately 400 students within nine facilities. College professors have come into the facilities to provide classroom instruction in the areas of Business Administration, Human Services and General

Studies to name a few. These students are able to receive credits while incarcerated and, if released, the students can then attend a community college in their area that provides the same area of study. Students have been selected utilizing the criteria provided by the US Department of Education. Students must also meet the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid) requirements and be approved for a Pell Grant before being able to participate. At the recently-established American Job Center at the New Haven Correctional Center, 77 inmates have participated in its job readiness workshops, 60 of those have been released into the community, and 37 of those have jobs with a remaining 19 ex-offenders still actively engaged with the American Job Center seeking employment. Finally, DOC's Parole and Community Services Division is actively engaged in assisting ex-offenders under its supervision with employment. Last month, it reported that slightly more than half of all the ex-offenders it is supervising are employed.

But DOC knows we can and need to do more. Last week, I participated in a forum organized by Oz Griebel and the MetroHartford Alliance for employers on the benefits of hiring ex-offenders. The remarks by Cheryl McDonald, one of the owners of Bears BBQ were very inspiring. She indicated that some of her first hires were ex-offenders who were vital in the success of her growing business. In addition, the DOC has worked very closely with our non-profit community partners which have done an outstanding job of assisting Ex-Offenders with job readiness and job search. In particular, DOC continues to assist the Greater Hartford Reentry Council with its annual Employment fair, which is being held this year on Tuesday, March 7th at the Marriott Hartford Downtown.

By improving the employment rate of ex-offenders, Connecticut will continue to lower rates of recidivism and see a corresponding reduction in the inmate population and number of prisons. The Department of Correction is committed to working with our partners in the Labor Committee and business community to accomplish this.