

Judiciary Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-521

AN ACT CONCERNING THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE DEPARTMENT OF

Title: CORRECTION.

Vote Date: 4/3/2018

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/26/2018

File No.: 556

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Judiciary Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

The bill would enact several priorities of the Department of Correction:

- 1) establishment of a First Chance Trust Fund to support programming and services for at-risk youth, thereby reducing the number of people who enter the adult prison system;
- 2) psychological evaluations for prospective DOC employees, which would allow the department to identify candidates who are best suited to the rigors of work in a prison setting;
- 3) establishment of a wellness initiative to address the unique needs of employees who interact with inmates, thereby reducing on the job injuries and the incidents of illness among DOC employees.

In addition, the bill makes technical changes that would enhance the department's administrative functions.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

State of Connecticut, Department of Correction, Scott Semple, Commissioner:

Commissioner Semple spoke in favor of the bill. He stated that the bill will enact several important priorities for the DOC:

- Section 1 – Psychological Evaluations for DOC Employees – Commissioner Semple shared that psychological testing is becoming the national standard in the corrections hiring process in order to identify candidates best suited to the rigors of staffing a correctional institution. Prospective employees, prior to an offer of employment, would

undergo a psychological evaluation. The prospective candidates would be responsible for paying for the test.

- Sections 2 through 4 – The First Chance Trust Fund – The Commissioner identified the First Chance Trust Fund as the most important initiative in the bill. He stated that the Trust Fund would be used to support programming and services for at-risk youth, thereby creating an infusion of resources at the front-end of the criminal justice system. He cited the First Chance Trust Fund model in Pennsylvania, stating that all of the evidence and feedback regarding the program has been positive. The Commissioner testified that he believes the proposal “has the potential to be a game-changer” by significantly reducing the number of people who enter the adult corrections system. Funding would come from a variety of sources – private donations, state and federal funds and nonprofit funding.
- Section 5 – Wellness Initiative for DOC Employees – Commissioner Semple described the various programs that would be offered to DOC staff to support the unique needs of employees who interact with inmates. He explained that, through these wellness efforts, DOC can reduce employee and retiree morbidity, the use of sick time, and workers’ compensation injuries. He stated that as Commissioner, one of his priorities is to address, and minimize, the on-going and specific incidents faced by DOC employees.
- Section 9 – Commissioner Semple explained that Section 9 adds “Benefit Corporations” to the list of entities to which the DOC Correctional Enterprises of CT may sell articles, materials products or services. He stated that, although Benefit Corporations were authorized in October 2014, the statute governing the Correctional Enterprises of CT has not been amended to include this entity. He spoke of the work done by benefit corporations in hiring returning citizens and reducing recidivism, as well as increasing inmate employment opportunities.
- Remaining sections - Commissioner Semple stated that the other sections of the bill were primarily technical in nature.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

CT Alliance of Boys & Girls Clubs, Don Maleto, Executive Director:

Mr. Maleto spoke in favor of the establishment of The First Chance Trust Fund. He stated that by investing in organizations such as the Boys & Girls Clubs through the Trust Fund, these organizations can strengthen the programs and services provided to at-risk youth, thereby keeping them from entering the criminal justice system.

2nd Chance Planet, Gregory Spear, Owner and President:

Mr. Spear spoke in favor of Section 9. He testified that his business is a Benefit Corporation that was established to assist formally incarcerated individuals with reintegrating into society through employment opportunities, job training and assistance with finding affordable housing. In addition, his company works to create job opportunities for formally incarcerated people. He stated that by including Benefit Corporations in the compact of entities with which Correctional Enterprises of CT can do business, more work opportunities will be available to inmates.

CT Community Nonprofit Alliance, Julia Wilcox, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy:

Ms. Wilcox submitted testimony in support of the concepts proposed in the bill. The Alliance requested the following language changes:

- Section 4 – provide an exemption regarding the 1% withholding for nonprofit providers that contract with the State;
- Section 2 (8) and (10) – Amend existing law to include The Alliance in the process to determine the criteria upon which recommendations are made regarding offender needs (subdivision 8), and include language in subdivision 10 that would require the Criminal Justice Policy Advisory Commission, when establishing community reentry centers, to work in partnership with nonprofit providers with established programs that employ best-practice, evidence-based program models.

CT Juvenile Justice Alliance, Abby Anderson, Executive Director:

Ms. Anderson stated that the CT Juvenile Justice Alliance strongly supports the creation of the First Chance Trust Fund, and applauds the philosophy and innovation behind the proposal. She shared that the Alliance has long promoted the need to both reduce the State's reliance on detention and incarceration, and to reinvest those dollars in prevention, diversion, and early-intervention programs. Further, she stated that the creation of the fund represents an important way to begin addressing and undoing the racial disparities that the justice system imposes on communities of color.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed.

Reported by: Susan Keane

Date: May 2, 2018