February 7, 2019

EXECUTIVE AND LEGISLATIVE 11:00 a.m.
NOMINATIONS COMMITTEE

CHAIRPERSON: Representative Ed Vargas

SENATORS: Bergstein, Davis, Duff, Fasano, Formica, Hartley, Looney, Moore, Witkos

REPRESENTATIVES: D'Agostino, Davis, DiMassa, Godfrey, Kushner, Perillo, Phipps, Vargas, Verrengia, Yaccarino

REP. VARGAS (6TH): [Gavel] I am hereby calling the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee meeting into order. We have quite an agenda in front of us and I'd like to, before we proceed, I'd like the Clerk to read the safety information.

CLERK: In the interest of safety, I would ask you to note the location of and access to the exits in this hearing room. The two doors through which you entered the room are the emergency exits and are marked with exit signs. In the event of any emergency, please walk quickly to the nearest exit. After exiting the room, go to your right and exit the building by the main entrance or follow the exit signs to one of the other exits. Please quickly exit the building and following any instructions from capitol police. Do not delay and do not return unless you are advised it is safe to do so. In the event of a lockdown announcement, please remain in the hearing room, stay away from the exit doors and seek concealment behind desks and chairs until an all-clear announcement is heard.
REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Madam Clerk and with that, we'll call the meeting to order and our first order of business today, and for those people who are not familiar with the procedures here at the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee, we have many members who hold leadership positions in other committees and overall leadership committees. We even have the President Pro Tem of the Senate, we have the Majority Leader, we have the Minority Leader, so we've got quite a few, quite a few people who are in leadership positions. They will be coming in and out as time allows him, so don't take it personal that sometimes people will have to leave the room, but they are, they have all read the biographies of the people here. They're in their offices, they follow it on closed circuit TV and we also give an opportunity for those legislators that are not present when we take our vote which will follow the public hearing to vote. We keep the votes open normally until 4 o'clock and if the hearing goes late, we may keep it open until 5:00. The first order of business is a House Resolution and its Commissioner Kurt Westby who's going to, whose been nominated to be Connecticut's Commissioner of Labor and he's with us today so I'll ask him to come forward.

Commissioner Westby, before you take a seat, could you please raise your right hand? Do you promise to tell us the truth and nothing but the truth?

KURT WESTBY: Yes sir, I do.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Please take a seat and it's customary for the Committee to allow the nominees to
make a statement as to why they feel they're qualified to head the department and what they feel they can contribute to the department they're about to head so I will allow Commissioner Westby to make his introductory remarks at this point.

KURT WESTBY: Thank you. Pardon my sore throat if I cough a little bit. Good morning Representative Vargas, Senator, uh Representative Perillo and members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. My name is Kurt Westby and I'm honored to sit before this committee today to be considered for Governor in Ed Lamont's Connecticut Department of Labor Commissioner.

As a background, I joined the DOL in January 2016 as Deputy Commissioner and was appointed to the position of Labor Commissioner in June 2018. I was recently appointed by Governor Lamont and look forward to continuing the agencies mission of providing quality workforce programs including employment services, unemployment assistance, workplace safety, and ensuring the proper payment of wages. I'm a graduate of Penn State University with a major in Sociology and German. I went on to attend graduate school at Cornell University and studied organization behavior. I received a Master's Degree in Sociology and Industrial Labor Relations and while at Cornell, more importantly, I met my future wife, Ana, and we moved to Middleton following our marriage.

Ana began working at Wesleyan while I started a job with the Service Employees Union. Since arriving at the agency, I've been actively involved in growing the agencies manufacturing apprenticeship program
and expanding the learn as you earn concepts to other occupations such as insurance, healthcare, and banking. Our Office of Apprenticeship Training provides a portable training credential. DOL has received funding to assist employers to develop apprenticeship programs. The Manufacturing Innovation Fund Apprenticeship Program provides financial assistance to Connecticut manufacturers that have a registered apprenticeship program.

In addition to the $8 million dollars received from DECD in 2015 for this initiative, DOL just received another $3 million dollars for the continuation of the program. The federally funded American apprenticeship initiative is also used to promote apprenticeships and in this case, apprenticeships that are flexible and can be easily customized to meet the needs of the employer and the apprentice such as in the banking and insurance industries that I mentioned a second ago, and we have other federal grants that we've actively gone after to achieve similar expansion of apprenticeships in other industries.

As part of a new exciting initiative, DOL is partnering with the German American Chamber of Commerce to provide a concise, consistent positive message to Connecticut businesses, guidance counselors, parents, students and workers on the benefits and successes of utilizing vocational training in the registered apprenticeship model. Our goal is to institutionalize middle-skilled training including apprenticeships into a larger framework involving our vocational and comprehensive
high schools and colleges. This partnership will explore pilot opportunities for small businesses to utilize the Chamber as an intermediary to provide consulting services to develop new programs, oversee vocational curriculum, oral and written testing, trainer evaluation, and trainee performance based on the industry needs.

With our state agencies, educational institutions and workforce development boards as well as businesses, we intend to leverage available funding to establish programs that place vocational training and academic studies on the same plane, complement each other and contribute to professional development and career success. As the number of registered apprenticeships increase, the goal is to ensure that competency testing maintains optimal levels of proficiency to keep Connecticut technical programs in particular amount the best in the country.

DOL has made strides to ameliorate the effects of both federal and state funding shortages. We have taken some aggressive measures at DOL here to continue our work. We have consolidated local American job center offices, transferred staff from funding deficit programs to funding surplus programs, reallocated staff to unemployment insurance claims processing and collections, created an internet IU claims filing system used by all claimants, and decommissioned the UI unemployment call centers and reallocated staff to American job centers. We did that because 3-1/2 years ago we had a $22-million-dollar federal deficit in our UI
budget and we've largely eliminated that deficit in the last 3-1/2 years.

We have sought and received funds from the state and from the US DOL to support our unemployment insurance modernization effort. UIM is a multi-state consortium effort of Connecticut, Maine, Rhode Island, and Mississippi developing an integrated UI tax, benefits and appeals system. UIM or modernization will result in significant cost savings by replacing aged computer systems that we have now with increased flexibility, security and adaptability for improved service and operational efficiency. It will give the DOL the ability to respond promptly and efficiently to both state and federal initiatives while enhancing the services we provide to our customers.

We estimate that implementation of the new system will be May 2021. We are doing everything in our power to bring that date a few months if we can and we're hoping to do it by October 2020. That is a very aggressive goal, but we're working on it.

While recognizing that Connecticut has some of the highest skilled workers in the nation, I also know that remaining competitive requires continuous education and training. With the resurgence of well-paid manufacturing jobs in our state, I see the agency as a key partner in helping employers meet the challenge of growing their business and the work force. The American Apprenticeship Initiative is a great example of how the employer and apprenticeship can work together to grow our economy by establishing quality and sustainable apprentice opportunities in high-growth occupations and
industries, particularly again, healthcare, business services, information technology, and naturally, advance manufacturing. American Apprenticeship Initiative training scholarships for registered apprentices and pre-apprentices are designed to promote pathways for demand-drive careers that meet the state's economic industry and workforce needs.

DOL's Office of Workforce Competiveness, OWC, the governor's principal workforce development policy adviser, assists the labor commissioner with the goal of ensuring that Connecticut has sufficient talent to support its economic growth. OWC works to coordinate and align resources, employment and training programs and as well, curricula to meet projected industry and job growth needs.

In addition, DOL leads Connecticut's efforts to implement the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, commonly known as WIOA, on behalf of the governor. WIOA provides federal funds to help job seekers, workers, and businesses with career services, job training and education, unemployment and job search assistance, information on the job market, job readiness, career planning and counseling, programs for non-English speakers, financial aid, supportive services and financial literacy. Connecticut has received approximately $35 million dollars for this initiative from the feds. The Workforce Development Boards in the state's five regions administer the WIOA programs. It is a true partnership with all stakeholders, job seekers, employers, and of course, the boards themselves and DOL.
Thank you for your consideration of my appointment as Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Labor. I would be happy to answer any questions that you may have.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Commissioner Westby. Congratulations on your appointment as Commissioner of the Department of Labor. I had the opportunity to work with you many times in trying to assist people who are working and you’ve always been at the front lines of helping people and families with their struggles and I know where your heart is at, and I can't think of anybody better to head the Labor Department. Now, you’ve got on your staff one of my favorite people, former Senator Dante Bartolomeo, so that's quite a strong team you have there at the Department of Labor and over the years, all I've heard is good things coming out of the Department so I'm happy to see that you're willing to do, to take on this role and this responsibility again. My only question is, what's going on with the unemployment fund. I know we ran out of money during the last recession. How does that look? Is it pretty stable? Are we taking any steps?

KURT WESTBY: It's stable today. It's stable until the next recession happens. The last go around in 2009, the recession hit, we had to borrow about a billion dollars and we had to pay that money back. We had to attach additional tax to the employers to pay that back so we are talking about that. We're gearing up for that. The board that oversees the trust fund is actively looking at some solutions that might put us in a preventative situation such that we don’t have to go through that again so it's
a potential problem. If a recession hits next year, we will be borrowing, no doubt. So we're trying to get ahead of the ball and some up with some, the board, I would love for the board to come up with something comprehensive to prevent to the legislature and we will see whether we can do that. We have a meeting on Monday to do just that.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): So the money that was borrowed from the federal government has been repaid at this point?

KURT WESBY: Yeah, the moneys that were borrowed I believe were repaid in 2016 and therefore, the additional tax that was assessed to the employers during that period from 2009 to 2016, you know, were eliminated and went down to the basic tax.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you. Congratulations again. I'll open it at this time for any committee members that have any questions. Yes, ranking member, Representative Perillo.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good morning and congratulations.

KURT WESBY: Thank you.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Just a few questions if I could. One thing I hear very frequently from employers is their concern about CHRO and a general sense that the employer is guilty until proven innocent. What are your, what's your response to that statement and what is your view of the role of CHRO and how it should balance the interests of all parties?
KURT WESBY: Uh, that's a toughie. I haven't personally heard a lot of statements that employers are automatically assumed guilty.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Are you serious?

KURT WESBY: Not, not a lot across my desk, uh, I'd certainly be willing to look into that. Um, uh, I would, I would be open to an examination of prior, um, prior cases to, to make an assessment of that. I believe it's a relative objective process, but I haven't been directly involved in any of their deliberations so I could, uh, I could look into that further if you wanted to.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Yeah, I, thank you, and I'd be curious to hear your thoughts on it. I'm actually kind of shocked that that's not come to your attention. It's something that I hear all the time from employers large and small, um, not just in my district but, you know, throughout the state so I'm just, I'm just shocked to hear you say you've never heard that before.

KURT WESBY: Well I haven't, I haven't complaints come across my desk in regard to what you're talking about. I'm not saying that there aren't disgruntled employers out there necessarily, but we could have a look at that.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Well, thank you.

KURT WESBY: I'm amenable to that.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you. In your testimony, you actually used a very important word and I appreciated you using it. You referred to
your customers. Who, in your eyes, is the customer of the Department of Labor?

KURT WESBY: That's an interesting question.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Two for two.

KURT WESBY: That depends on, uh, we have a lot of departments in the Department of Labor, uh, so if, if we're talking about our Wage and Hour Division, generally the, the customers are the, are workers who might call in with a concern or maybe with a complaint. If we're talking about our Worker Development Programs of which there are very many, customers are also employers. We've, we've, we have at the Department of Labor and I have personally spent a lot of my time reaching out to employers, particularly the manufacturing industry, but not only, to employers and to associations, all the associations, the manufacturing associations to talk about their needs and to promote apprenticeship quite frankly because I think it's needed.

As you, as you probably know, there is a massive need for trained employees in manufacturing and other industry as well, but particularly manufacturing that is not being met here in the State of Connecticut. We're trying to figure out why. I happen to think that a robust apprenticeship program is the answer for that for employers. It's been the answer for that in a lot of other countries. We've had the inducement to promote that such as the MIF that I talked about, such as AAI, and other federal grants that we've gone after and gotten.
The employer community has embraced that, not after a little convincing on our part because often there's, you know, initially anyway, there was some reticence about dealing with the Department of Labor just because we're the Department of Labor and we also have an enforcement arm as you, as you well know. So, but that reticence has been overcome a lot with employers, when they find that, you know, we want to treat them as clients. We want to help manufacture and we want to help employment. That includes employers and employees get good paying jobs and we're well on the way to doing that, but frankly, we've only scratched the surface and we have a lot to do. So employers and employees.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you very much. I appreciate that. Um, it was actually kind of funny, somebody mentioned to me yesterday they were looking at your resume and noticed that you have an extensive background in organized labor. The question that was asked of me, and take no offense please, but isn't that kind of like, you know, the fox in the henhouse. Could you explain to me the value that perhaps that background brings?

KURT WESBY: Well, working with working and employers you, look, you can't run an effective labor union without having a good relationship with employers, I don't think, particularly in the private sector. You have to have a working relationship. You have to have respect from both sides and I could tell you I believe firmly that I've engendered that respect from both sides. It's hard to get anything done if you can't sit and talk to your, to your partners or to your adversaries in
some cases when it comes to labor relations so you've got to have that and that's always been my approach. You, you know you can't be so ideological that you lose sight of mutual win for both sides. I just simply don't believe that. So I think in a general sense it's prepared me for that, and uh, as well as some of my graduate study training has prepared me for that. But I just think mainly working with all sides and coming to a solution is a universal thing that can be applied anywhere frankly.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you. In that answer, you mentioned something and I think it's very interesting. You obviously addressed the importance of having a strong relationship with the employer, with management. You said though particularly in the private sector is it less important in the public sector to have a good relationship with management?

KURT WESBY: Uh, no, it's not less important, but I might suggest that it's harder in the, it's been harder in the past in the private sector due to, the private sector one could argue is a little more, can be a lot more volatile particularly in the low-wage industry where I represented workers. People making minimum wage. There's a lot of volatility and it's, it's, the, the industries aren't anywhere nearly as advanced in terms of labor management relations as they are in the public sector so it's, it can be a little more difficult. There's often more crisis involved, more potential layoffs involved, not to say that it's not important in the public sector. It's crucial in the public sector, it's just that
it's more I would say a little more developed and accepted as an overall industry in the public sector.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you very much. I appreciate that. Just before I close, something was discussed before this committee two days ago that's not related to the Department of Labor. It's actually related to the Department of Children and Families. It was a particular instance where a young girl in the care of DCF was unfortunately killed. Many efforts made by medical providers, practitioners to make DCF aware of problems in the home really went unheeded, it seems, and the employees involved in that situation are still employed by DCF, a different agency than yours, I understand that. But I'm just curious, especially with your background in labor, what your thoughts are as to how the union should play a role in determining the outcome, the eventual outcome for those employees who were involved?

KURT WESBY: Well you have an institutionalized grievance across the board in state employment just as with any union whether it's state or private. I happen to think it works. If the union feels that whatever determination were made by the administration for any employee is unreasonable, then the union files a grievance and they go through their steps and make a determination. So I think you have a procedure there that suffices quite adequately ultimately, with a set neutral arbitrators making a decision on whatever's brought forward to them.
REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative. Yes, Representative Yaccarino, you have the floor.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and thank you, Mr. Westby, Commissioner Westby for being here. As far as labor, I've been here starting my ninth year and we've passed many apprenticeship programs, manufacturing programs, but we seem to be in the same wheelhouse. We have the jobs there but not connecting the pieces together. We have [inaudible - 00:26:07] as materials and manufacturing, we try to emphasize that. What is your plan as far as Commissioner of Labor to address this? It's a growing problem. We have an aging work force and not just in trade, but in the manufacturing area.

KURT WESBY: Well I have a few ideas that we've been playing with. I do believe that there are a lot of silos out there, I'll agree with you on that. In terms of various institutions dealing with it ineffectively in a lot of cases, but we don't have the numbers. We're not generating the numbers that we need for demand as you're saying, that's true. We, the examples that I gave in my testimony are to a certain extent piecemeal examples. Going out to employers and associations, helping them achieve apprenticeship programs and incumbent worker training programs and grants to train up their folks so that they can be competitive and we think they've been successful. They've helped thousands of workers over the last few years, still not enough.
Last year, the legislature bonded, didn’t bond, put through legislation that would allow for the bonding of $50 million dollars for approaches that go through the work development boards that mimic to a certain extent the EWIB, the Eastern Workforce Development Board out in Eastern Connecticut, their very successful training program. One of those was bonded late last year and we're looking at the proposal for $5 million dollars. You know, that's a great first step. That's one thing we are doing. I would, if you asked me, I would say that you should consider bonding more of that money because it's a relative small investment per worker who would be trained to get into places like EB and Sikorsky and all of the supplier organizations as well so that's one thing, but we need I think a larger more comprehensive to our educational system.

We've been going around, in addition to the manufacturers and other employers talking, looking at our high schools and even our elementary and where monies are allocated to the CTE program and Perkin's grants. There's going to be more money coming in under, through Perkins. You should seriously look at growing some of the vocational training programs across the board including comprehensive high schools across the board to really get this thing going. They know there's a cultural need for it at the high schools, I think. There's a need for monies. The local boards of education are excited when we come over and give out pre-apprenticeship diplomas. They love it because they see these kids on more of an equal plane with
all the other kids. It's bringing back shop into the Connecticut schools. We think it's very, we know it's very popular because we've done it in a lot of schools, but it's not at the scale where it needs to be. I think considering, you know, using some of those, some more of those Perkins dollars for training programs in the schools would go a long way.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): I appreciate that answer. If you at, we do put a lot of piecemeal, a lot of money in a lot of pots, but we don't have a comprehensive plan and if you look at Germany, it's a small country obviously, but they all start in the sixth, what is equivalent to our sixth and seventh grades where you learn trade, you learn basic engineering of course through mathematics, and by the time you graduate high school there, you have an associate's degree in whatever trade or basic engineering, and then you can go out and get a job.

We could do that, I think, and any state could do that, but you have to have a comprehensive plan. If you look at Lyman Hall High School in Wallingford. It's not my district, but they're amazing, not just agriculture, but manufacturing, machinists, learning how to raise animals, dissect, you know, they do everything. So I think as the Commissioner of Department of Labor, I would really look at the whole state and have a real plan instead of, we piecemeal everything. We really need to have a comprehensive plan and be on the same page.

You have Southern Connecticut that does some materials and manufacturing, but the other state colleges, they don't really, I don't believe they
really participate. Southern does a great job with the money that they utilize so I really believe, as a legislator, but more so as the Commissioner of Labor, we need to have a comprehensive plan and be on the same page because we have an aging workforce and there are a lot of people that don't have work because either they're not skilled, they go on the unemployment rolls and then it's just, you know, a spiraling cycle.

KURT WESBY: I think you're completely right and I, we are working on a comprehensive plan and, and it will involve some of the stuff I just talked about, but you know, we've been, we've been, we've been going to high schools, uh, the community colleges and you know working with employers such that apprenticeship credits start at the lowest level and, and as we proceed through higher education, all those credits, all those educational opportunities are recognized at every level going up. We've been doing that, things like that, but it's, but, but it needs to be more comprehensive, I agree with you, and we have a few ideas that we're playing with right now to meet that need that you're talking about and you're completely correct on that I think.

REP. YACCAINO (87TH): One last thing, in 2009, a few years ago, the business community along with the government paid back all those unemployment dollars. We really cannot sustain that again so hopefully we don't go down that road again.

KURT WESBY: I agree.

REP. YACCAINO (87TH): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.
REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Yaccarino. We also have some questions from Senator Formica. Senator Formica, your turn.

SEN FORMICA (20TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and good morning. Thank you, Commissioner, good morning and thank you for coming today. I a couple of followup questions with regard to Representative Yaccarino, that being the labor assessment, those large labor assessments that were inflicted on the business community to make up that repayment of the borrowing. Has there been a change in the dollars available to be earned on the, before you're eligible for unemployment? My understanding is that you can earn $600 dollars and then become eligible for unemployment which seems very, very low to me and the reason that this assessment fund could be, you know, be in trouble because of.

KURT WESBY: There hasn't been a change but, but the um advisory board overlooking um the policy of the fund is looking at that amongst other things um, you know on the benefit side. That hasn't changed in yeas uh by the way, but some of the other um aspects haven't changed in years as well such as the taxable wage base has been at $15,000 dollars for 20 years so on both sides of the equation um, uh there, there hasn't been any change so yes, you're right. And I think that is one of the areas that the committee is looking at and they're driving to come up with something comprehensive that, that hopefully they'll be able to present um soon maybe.

SEN. FORMICA (20TH): It would kind of, if I'm paraphrasing, it would more reflect the earnings
opportunities in this day and age, $600 dollars is very low.

KURT WESBY: Right.

SEN. FORMICA (20TH): That other one is very low so we could be parcel of a large solution that would hopefully reduce the need for all of the borrowing if we do get another recession in another year or two years.

KURT WESBY: We need comprehensive reform badly. None of the metrics or parameters have been basically updated for decades or most of them haven’t so we absolutely need that. By the way, if we, if we miraculously come up with a resolution, um from both sides, employers and labor, tomorrow and if there's a recession anywhere near the one we had in 2008, we're going to have the same problem we had last time because this would require time to build up some reserves so that's all the more reason to get something done as soon as we can.

SEN. FORMICA (20TH): Do you plan a leadership role as your position in commissioner in driving that change?

KURT WESBY: I'm not a voting member of the board, but I go to every meeting. We use a department labor office to hold these meetings. I am trying my best to be involved to get both sides together to come up with something so I guess the answer is, I'd like to say so.

SEN. FORMICA (20TH): Okay, good. I hope that you push some of those solutions forward. You seem to be in agreement so thank you. You mentioned EWIB
and their leadership in workforce training for entry level manufacturing positions and we have a community college system that's struggling. It's going backwards by tens of millions of dollars and needs to have some kind of long-term fix. Nobody wants to close a community college or consolidate. It runs into problematic in everybody's district, but EWIB presides, provides this opportunity as a short-term week's program to get into places as you mentioned, Sikorsky and Electric Boat who then take on the lion share of the training and bring these people forward and that is a wonderful program, worked very well. Congressman Courtney brought some federal dollars in many years ago to get that going and this budget that we're under now I think has pushed that forward.

So my question would be, would it make sense to take one of these community colleges somewhere and repurpose it into a trade school encompassing a wide variety of trades from the construction trades to the culinary trades to you know whatever trade that you have and, and begin this connection from the echo type programs that we have in New London for the manufacture introduction training I think that you referred to high schools and kind of drive everyone there because I'm probably one of the few people in this room old enough to remember when we had shop, you know auto shop and mechanic shop and wood shop and everything else and we got out of that business in education because of cost to maintain instructors to serve and insurance situations. So if we centralized that and then spent some dollars on transportation, getting some of these kids there once a week and repurpose a community college, I
mean it just seems like it would be on the way to solve a couple of problems at the same time. Do you think there might be a need for that or am I just way out of whack on that?

KURT WESBY: Speaking at Kurt Wesby, Commissioner of Labor, in a general sense I think there is a need for that, but it's already being done. I mean the community college Make It Work program or Make It Here program has been around for a couple of years and they've been advocating, you know their ten-month program. Now this is in manufacturing, but they have expanded that I believe to seven of the colleges or so. Wildly successful. People are getting trained up you know in those areas that are needed and they're getting, you know, very good paying jobs out of that program so personally, I think you could do that with even more industries and even augment further what they're doing in the manufacturing arena because its' been so popular and the need is still there.

SEN. FORMICA (20TH): Does that ten-month program compete with EWIB's program or?

KURT WESBY: Does it compete with [crosstalk]. I wouldn’t argue that it competes because there's such a drastic need across the board for high-tech jobs that there is no competition.

SEN. FORMICA (20TH): All right, thank you. And I have one last question regarding the Federal Work Opportunity Tax Credit which is something that is a credit against federal tax returns for businesses to encourage employment and you know SNAP participants and TANF participants and other states have used it
successfully to spur economic development you know throughout their states because it doesn’t cost the state really anything, but Connecticut seems to be behind in that and there seems to be a backlog and the Labor Department has started pushing that out. I've introduced a bill this year to kind of try to move that along because it seemed to go Representative Yaccarino's comment about, you know we gotta find ways of putting people to work better and if we could have a win-win situation where people can work and want to work, but yet the businesses can get a tax credit that's not supported by the state budget or the state departments so I'm wondering if you think that we could make that a priority or if there's a problem in that area that I'm not seeing.

KURT WESBY: I'd love to see the language that you’ve proposed. I haven’t seen it yet but it is a problem. There is a backlog and there's been a backlog for several years now. We are addressing it. The problem is that the amount of funding that we get to enact that and to staff it is woefully low. We don’t get anywhere near the federal monies to actually run the program. We've been putting where we can in certain instances additional staff on it when we can to reduce that back log, but the back log is a problem. You know I believe right now we're kind of running even based on the number of tax credit applications that come in. We're roughly getting the tax credits out at the same rate which is better than we had been doing before, but I will agree with you. You know, we, there is a backlog and we'd like to address it as quick as we can. The problem is staffing.
SEN. FORMICA (20TH): All right. Well thank you very much and I'll share that language. It's very basic.

KURT WESBY: I'd appreciate that.

SEN. FORMICA (20TH): I'll share that language and I'd love to try to find a way to move forward.

KURT WESBY: And it's a shame because we're talking about giving tax credits to employers, federal tax credits to employers so you want to get out. Eventually they're getting them, but they're waiting too long I think you're right. Yeah, okay.

SEN. FORMICA (20TH): Thank you very much. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I appreciate your indulgence.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Senator Formica. Senator Kushner, you have the floor.

SEN. KUSHER (24TH): Good morning. Thank you, Mr. Chairman and good morning, Commissioner. It's good to see you here.

KURT WESBY: Good morning.

SEN. KUSHER (24TH): I think I was really, I personally am very impressed with your resume, having that combination of representation of workers and the education that goes hand in hand with making sure that you have a breadth of knowledge and a breadth of understanding of the issues that are faced. I was also interested in your answer to one of our colleagues here about how and through your experience in your labor, especially in the private sector, you have a good understanding of the needs of employers because I found that to be the case as
well in my time in negotiating contracts. It's not a one-sided deal. You need to, you can't just walk in and say this is what the workers need and everything falls in place. You know, there's often a need for a sophisticated understanding of the employer and the challenges they face and so I also appreciated what you said about the process by which grievances can be addressed in a setting where there's a process and where there's a neutral that makes a final determination because I think that's a very good way to address issues in the workplace and make sure that people have presentation, have a process, due process before decisions are made that are affecting peoples' livelihood and their entire family.

So I think that, you know the answers you've given today for me are very satisfying and I think that we have a challenge in this state to address the needs of our working families and I think you're poised well to do that. So I don't really have any questions for you, just to comment that I, having known you in the past and known your dedication and your seriousness about these issues that I'm very happy to see that you've been reappointed by Governor Lamont and I look forward to working with you.

KURT WESBY: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Yes, the Chair recognizes Senator Witkos.

SEN. WITKOS (8TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just had a quick question. I had the opportunity to go visit with the Department of Labor about a year and
a half ago regarding an issue where an individual files unemployment claims, but they were not, their current employer wasn’t their most recent employer, so I learned a lot about the whole process there and one of the items that seemed to be reoccurring was a needed upgrade to the computer system there, and I'm just wondering if you can give me an update as to where we are on that?

KURT WESBY: Um, I touched very briefly on that in my, in my comments, but the, where we're at today is we're in a consortium. Mississippi modernized their system several years ago with federal dollars primarily. We are part of a consortium. We're actually fourth in place. Maine adopted that system and has largely modernized as we call it. Rhode Island is in the middle of that process. We're next. We're onboarding right now so we've been working on everything our IT people have to do to transfer everything we have in our current ancient system to the new modernized system. It's a lot of work. It's a lot of staff. It's a, it's a major challenge to the system because it impacts everything we do.

Our adoption date is May 2021. There's a possibility we could, we could be done before then. We're working on that, but not a guarantee so we think in a little over two years we'll be in a position of having been or nearly finished with modernization.

SEN. WITKOS (8TH): Commissioner, to me, that's not fast enough. When I had heard that some folks who were filing for unemployment benefits because they work in seasonal type of employment, I get that
there's large increases of claims during certain periods of time, you know, depending on what they do for work and I didn’t realize that all the claims are received electronically now. There's not a pile of paperwork because I said couldn’t we reassign employees so that was part of my learning of that and I just tried to go on the Department of Labor website to look something up and that website is not functioning, it's not loading. So I think there are IT problems over at your agency. I think that more directive needs to be done especially if we're moving towards the point where folks that are impacted by the Department of Labor have to do filings on line. If you can't get there, it's extremely upsetting to them and slows things down because then you, you can't spread that out depending on how long the outage is for over that period of time and I don't know how somebody reaches out to somebody to make them aware that, hey, guess what? I just tried getting on your website and it's not working.

So I would ask that you put that as a, on the top of your priority list as you work through the next couple of years. I did have a question about binding arbitration. We always talk about in this building different things with collective bargaining and binding arbitration and one of the things that seems to be a potential fix, and I'd like your comment on, changing from a last best offer to let an arbitrator decide somewhere in the middle of those decisions. And then also, a single arbitrator versus a three-panel board.
KURT WESBY: To your first point, modernization is number one on our priority list. When I came in 2016 and we were well into it, it's a big challenge. The vast majority of people who apply for benefits by computer have no problems whatsoever. There are some people that trickle through and there are issues now and then, particularly in the peak times that you mentioned. There are longer waiting periods and those are challenges. We've addressed those issues this year to the point where the waiting periods are way less than they were last year and that involved a lot of reallocation of staff and cross training. It's a major priority at the Department of Labor. Is two years fast enough from where at? It's never fast enough and it's a major undertaking so you're right, but we are working on it and it's very important and if you ever wanted a primer in this and more in depth, you can come on over to DOL and we'll give you one in terms of where we're at.

As far as binding arbitration goes, I don't personally think that having an arbitrator act basically as a mediator or someone who chooses between last best offers makes the most sense. I'd have to look at it. It hasn't been that way for a long time. Allowing an arbitrator to that degree of ability to decide could really upset the applecart in terms of how both sides view it, but you know, we could, you could have a look at it. I'd have to study it. I happen to be a creature of the past where that never has been the case so I'm acquainted with the process as it is and frankly, I think it works but I'd be open to alternative thoughts.
SEN. WITKOS (8TH): Well, let me ask you this then. If you think they would be giving too much authority to that, I personally was insulted when, and I think Governor Malloy made the right decision, if you recall after Storm Alford when the food waiver or vouchers were available and we had employees of the State going there and signing up for food vouchers, and there were multiple warnings throughout that process. If you commit fraud on this or over-claim, you know you're subject to not only criminal sanctions but loss of employment and I forget how many people filed fraudulent claims, but Governor Malloy fired them and the Labor Board came back and said that's too severe so get your jobs back. And in my opinion, using your words, don't you believe that is a little authoritarian on the Labor Board to be able to make that decision when these individuals not only committed fraud, but larceny and those are criminal charges and it's simple loss of employment with no jail time?

KURT WESBY: Well, I certainly wouldn't adjudicate that case here not knowing all the facts and I did read a little bit about that in the paper so I would be hard pressed to make a determination on that now. I understand your frustration looking at it on face value. There are cases on both sides where people complain very strongly that they were rubbed the wrong way. It's not just on the employer side. Often it's on the employee side so I just offer a little bit of warning in terms of that, on that account and sometimes you read cases and you don't necessarily hear all the factors in regard to that case, how much of certain behavior might have been condoned up until that point in some way or another.
You know, you just don’t know so you’d really have to look at it.

SEN. WITKOS (8TH): My last line of questions. Do we have a system set up where we almost discourage individuals to go back to seek employment if their unemployment compensation or work benefits that they receive from the state are far superior than they would get if they were actually receiving a private wage or public wage for work?

KURT WESBY: Do we have a system where we condone getting more unemployment you're saying. No, I don't think we do. We have a, we're receiving federal monies called [inaudible - 00:53:00] monies right now with a pilot project to encourage and actually push rather strongly the employment process as a condition of receiving your unemployment benefits so you know we're actively involved in promoting and requiring work search efforts that are even beyond the work search efforts that are in existence today so I don't think that's the case.

SEN. WITKOS (8TH): Do you think the state should, let me put it a different way, the state should modernize their benefits in such respect so that it encourages individuals to work. Say if you're currently receiving benefits now, so right now, I'll give you a good example, Care for Kids. The state provides a child welfare meeting daycare services to working individuals, but yet if an individual works and makes too much money, those benefits are cut off at a certain level. Do you think the state should try to be more inventive and promote maybe a weaning off of those services to allow that individual that was maybe only working part-time to work full-time
and not be in fear of getting those benefits cut off, and in the long run, the state would save money because that individual is working full-time, maybe now receiving insurance because they're a full-time employee, a positive role model for their children, etc.?

KURT WESBY: I think if, yeah, if I understand your question, I think there's, personally I think there's room to encourage full-time work and to encourage getting off of benefits and there's a lot of ways around, you know around that. The problem is for a certain population, people are working sometimes two or three jobs, part-time jobs, and they're not really encouraged to work because they're making so little anyway so if there are ways to encourage work and to get off benefits and to have dignity on the job and to be able to bring home enough money for your family, then I think we should definitely want to look at that.

SEN. WITKOS (8TH): And is that something that the Department is doing now or are you looking at maybe something of that nature?

KURT WESBY: No, we're not doing that now. I mean that involves talking with other agencies. I have, you know, that topic has come up a little bit in the past regarding minimum wage, for example. It gets way more complicated than you might think you'd want it to in some of my conversations over at some other agencies, but I think the goal should be full-time work with benefits and if you achieve that goal then theoretically, the idea is that you're getting off of all these support systems.
SEN. WITKOS (8TH): Thank you and I believe there are some bills floating in the legislature this session so you may want to just consult with your colleagues because I'm sure folks will be looking to state agencies for comment.

KURT WESBY: Yep.

SEN. WITKOS (8TH): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Senator Witkos. Any other members of the Committee? Yes, Senator Hartley, you have the floor.

SEN. HARTLEY (15TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and Commissioner Westby, it's with great welcome that we see you back here again and will be working with you as we go into the rest of this legislative session. So I just want to as a foot note mention to you, and I appreciate your participation actually last year when we were trying to work out the apprenticeship tax pass through to LLC's. No surprise, we are going to be proposing that again and so I would like to just you know connect with your office so that we get this over this finish line and signed this time.

KURT WESBY: I appreciate that.

SEN. HARTLEY (15TH): Okay. To be continued.

KURT WESBY: Yes, ma'am.

SEN. HARTLEY (15TH): And then, if I might briefly, Mr. Chairman, on another note so yes, I apologize having missed your opening introduction, but apprenticeships are so important, externships, internships, and the like. We've seen the
demonstrated results of the benefit of those in all sectors, manufacturing being obviously very important, but I noticed that you have also identified cyber internships. We recently were able to at the community college in Waterbury Naugatuck Valley Committee College start the first, as you probably know, credentialed cyber degree and you know, also hoping now to connect that to the conclusion of two more years for a four-year undergraduate degree. But can you talk to me very briefly about what the department has been doing in this particular sector?

KURT WESBY: Well we're looking at that model. Cathy Awwad with the Workforce Development Board over there has been working with that very example you're talking about. I believe that we're using that format for something that we can more quickly than not into a universally recognized cyber apprenticeship program. We're not done with it yet but we're, I'm told we're pretty close to being done with that. We've been discussing the parameters for that program with Capitol Community College as well and using, and using the Waterbury example so I'm hoping that we're going to have that wrapped up in about a month.

SEN. HARTLEY (15TH): So we have just graduated our first cohort of students and they are all gainfully employed.

KURT WESBY: Yeah.

SEN. HARTLEY (15TH): And doing very well. We had also established internships with that program with a local bank and then also with a cyber-company also
in the area so yes, we're looking to grow those apprenticeship opportunities, internships and so forth so, and Cathy has been a wonderful partner as well so however we can, you know grow that, you know that the job demand is there and we of course want to employ Connecticut folks first before we are importing people from other states and beyond.

KURT WESBY: Senator, you're right. I agree it's a priority of the Department of Labor and we have people working on that right now to get that thing done and we want to expand across the State of Connecticut with that as well as our banking apprenticeships too.

SEN. HARTLEY (15TH): Yeah, and I think that we can really distinguish ourselves, this state, on that sector and also in coopting federal money because there is, there are those opportunities to also couple with federal resources.

KURT WESBY: We have done that. We're using our American Apprenticeship, AAI, American Apprenticeship something, uh, federal grants for those apprenticeships right now.

SEN. HARTLEY (15TH): Thank you. I look forward to continuing the conversation and working on this. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Senator Hartley. Any other members of the Committee wishing to make a statement or ask a question? Yes, vice-chair Phipps?

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Commissioner, welcome and congratulations on your re-nomination. Just a few
questions. The first, how does equity play in the role of your work?

KURT WESBY: That's a broad question. Could you be a little more specific on that? In terms of internal hiring you mean at DOL?

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): It's purposely broad because I think it's about both hiring, but also execution of, as you mentioned the clients and customers I think were the words that you used.

KURT WESBY: Yeah.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): How does equity play in how we service the customers?

KURT WESBY: Well let's look at our initiative with the Working Cities Program. Working Cities is a program promoted by the Boston Fed. It applies to six cities including Middletown and a few other cities in the state looking at our programs, particularly intercity youth and intercity adult populations, and coming up with something innovative that will drive up employment and good jobs in those areas. That's working cities. Our WIOA programs that I was talking about earlier, the federal monies largely are being pressed at intercity populations to try to get them into our, into our apprenticeship programs, into higher-paying jobs so we're making a concerted effort at DOL to go after those very populations particularly African American and Latino populations in the cities, getting them on our super highway toward access to jobs that in the past they haven't had access to.
So that's a priority for the Department of Labor and the vehicle is, one of the vehicles is the Working Cities Program and the apprenticeship initiative effort that I was talking about earlier. All the work development boards, most of them, are presenting proposals for that first amount of $5 million dollars that I was talking about earlier which will involve those exact populations to get them employed up particularly in manufacturing. So that's targeted and the idea is to make a big mark in those populations and to leverage monies from WIOA but also our apprenticeship monies, what we have left.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Thank you for that. I think there's two of us members that are part of the Gen Y generation and we're seeing that proliferation of the gig economy so if you could speak to how we're classifying employees and whether or not, and how your department is really keeping control and um, um, [laughs] and keeping control of the use of independent contractors and 1099 employees.

KURT WESBY: At Department or Labor or, I'm not sure what you're asking.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): I would say the Department of Labor along with other agencies have a role in making sure that we're having our organizations. I know part of that would also be the Department or Revenue Services, but I think when we're looking at Uber and Lyft and several others, we're starting to see the use of 1099, probably used incorrectly and is there a role for your department to help keep track of that and making sure that [crosstalk].
KURT WESBY: Yes, there is a role for that and on a regular basis cases cross our desks because we have to determine whether workers are employees or whether they're not employees. If you're an employee, that means the employer has to pay employee taxes and therefore, you'll get unemployment when you're laid off, for example. So we have to actively make those determinations, and issues such as Uber workers, gig employers fall under that category, and there are, we have an ABC test that determines whether or not a worker is an employee or a contracted out "independent contractor." So we've been doing that for quite a long time and we continue to do it and with the increase of, as you refer gig employees, you know in the workforce, it's becoming even more important because that's a growing sector.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Do you think there is room for either a new classification or some sort of gray area classification where they're not quite employees but they're not quite independent contractors. So for instance, Uber specifically, there are clear rules that you have to follow, what kind of car you can have, seat capacity, so on and so forth; however, they're not an employee. Like they can report to work whenever they want, so on and so forth. So is there room to help monitor this new sort of economy that we have?

KURT WESBY: I suppose there's always room. I generally, look we're accustomed to the employment model at Department of Labor and with that employment model usually comes benefits and employees generally like that because if they work,
you know, an Uber type company, they lose their job, they have nothing and then they realize they may be in more of a pickle than they had through prior. Could there be alternative intermediary models out there? I suppose. I haven’t studied any of them if they even exist. It could be an area where we end up because it's a strong tendency out there and something is going to have to give. The problem is there are other issues at stake. As you know, with more part-timeization and more conditional work, insurance doesn’t come with those jobs yet we don’t have, you know we don’t have alternatives so what are you gonna do? So federal and state policy also has a big impact on these sorts of workers so it's a very complicated scenario and it certainly deserves a lot of attention because people are left out of the normal supports that most workers have.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): And I think that's something, I think as you called it, something has to give is the part that I would love to work with you on a little further.

KURT WESBY: Well that's fine because you live right down the road, we can do that.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): [laughter] Two more or actually three more questions. Senator Formica started to talk about the role that college and education plays in your department, and I think looking at interagency work is going to be super important. Is there a role that we can have with higher education, specifically with preparing our community college students with the work that, like I think looking at jobs like phlebotomists, radiologist, so and so forth, is there a role that we plan in helping
prepare our students more directly for the jobs that we have available?

KURT WESBY: There's always a role for that. Part of it has to do with funding. Part of it has to do with I think with identifying those jobs in consultation with the employer community to be sure they exist. That’s what we do with apprenticeship. You know, you have to have a relationship with employers to know what the needs are out there so I think that there's a huge area of overlap you know that I think could probably be improved on although you know the community college system and the state system do I think a pretty good job of that. They're always looking at the needs. They're always identifying industries you know where employment is going up. I sit on those boards so I think they're doing a great job with that. You know, having said that, there's undoubtedly always room for improvement.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): And kind of along the lines where you talked about like something has to give. I think we're also seeing more and more use of nondisclosure agreements as part of a condition of employment. What role do you think they'll serve in our current economy in the role between workers and management?

KURT WESBY: Well I haven’t really looked at that too carefully, but I would be, I would beware of them. It depends on how the nondisclosure agreement is fashioned. It depends on the confidence of the nondisclosure agreement but, so in some cases they might be useful, in other cases, I think way too constrictive in terms of what the employee would be
able to do after leaving employment. You'd just, you'd have to look at it, so I would be, overall, if you had to push me for an answer, wary.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Thank you and I tend to agree. And the last question, the prevailing wage and the limits were I think raised as part of your department. If you could talk more about that and why that makes sense and how that’s better for our customers and our community?

KURT WESBY: Are you saying the prevailing, recently the prevailing, the federal prevailing wage numbers for certain classifications have gone up?

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Yeah, let me, and of course my computer's going down so I can't [crosstalk].

KURT WESBY: I haven’t looked at the numbers recently so I'll just take your statement as a, as fact.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): One moment let me get this back up so I can read the exact language of what I'm talking about. Most of this stuff I can do through my head, but that is not one. There we go. In 2017, the legislature, they raised the limits I think for prevailing rates for construction projects from I think $400,000 dollars to $1 million dollars.

KURT WESBY: Oh, okay.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): And if you could talk about how's that better for the community and how's that better for the customers that we're talking about that we're serving.
KURT WESBY: Well I, it, it's not my job necessarily to comment on that. If you raise the thresholds for prevailing wages to take place you'll have, you know more jobs that aren't covered by the prevailing wage and therefore, more people not earning a prevailing wage and you'll have fewer people earning a living wage. You won't have that so from a worker point of view [coughs], excuse me, it's a problem. From an employer point of view, it's a potential savings.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): I know you have a great team behind you. I see one of my favorite State Senators from before working behind you so I know you have a great team and looking forward to working with you.

KURT WESBY: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Phipps. Any further questions or comments? If not, I want to congratulate you, oh. We have our Senate Chair, Senator Duff with us who'd like to.

SEN. DUFF (25TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair and Commissioner, I just want to congratulate you on your appointment and I think you’ve done a fine job over the last few years and you do have a good team behind there, former colleague in the State Senate who is I know very happy to be working with you as well and you know, keep up the good work. We enjoyed celebrating over in New Haven a few months ago with the Platform to Employment Program and also the Mortgage Crisis Job Training Program which we started, which has now become a national model and your agency has done great work on that.

We know certainly that staffing has been an issue with folks but we appreciate the work you’ve done
with the amount of staff and resources you have. It's not always been easy, but you're a creative person and you have good staff behind you so we appreciate what you do. Thank you.

KURT WESBY: Thank you, and it's always been a pleasure working with you all the way back.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Senator Duff and again, Commissioner Wesby, congratulations again on your appointment to the DOL and we have one question we ask of all our nominees before we let them go. Is there anything you believe in your past that might prove embarrassing to this committee, to the Governor or to the State of Connecticut?

KURT WESBY: No.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well thank you very much. That concludes this portion of the public hearing and also the House Resolutions. Let's put the Committee at ease for a couple of minutes for a stretch and then we'll reconvene.

KURT WESBY: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Okay folks let's reconvene. Got a lot of business. [Gavel] Will Committee members and guests please take their seats? Okay, we have before us now four Senate Resolutions, the first of which is Commissioner Rollin Cook of Weatogue who has been appointed Commissioner of Corrections. Will Commissioner Cook join us and before you take your seat, would you please raise your right hand? Do you promise to tell us the truth and nothing but the truth?

ROLLIN COOK: Yes, sir.
REP. VARGAS (6TH): Please be seated. I have a request from our ranking member, from the Senate, Senator Fasano who would like to begin this portion of the public hearing so at this point, I am going to, before Senator Fasano starts his questions, we'll give the Commissioner his opportunity for his initial statement. Please proceed.

ROLLIN COOK: Thank you. I promise to be brief. Good morning, Chairman Vargas and Duff, ranking members Fasano and Perillo, and the honorable members of the Executive Legislative Nominations Committee. I'm Rollin Cook, nominee for Commissioner of the Connecticut Department of Corrections. It's an immense honor to appear before you today as Governor Lamont's selection to lead one of the top correction departments in the United States. I'm equally humbled at the opportunity to work with our legislators and to serve alongside our courageous and dedicated Department of Correction employees.

As most of you know, my path to this opportunity is different from many of my predecessors in that I've traveled across our country from my home state of Utah to serve here in the great State of Connecticut. My biggest challenge since arriving here a few weeks ago --

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Take your time.

ROLLIN COOK: Has been missing my family who's unconditionally supported me throughout the years and throughout my career. My wife and I have been married for over 30 years. Although she is not able to be with me here today, she is closely watching on
the internet. I have two awesome sons who are now young men, one of which is married. I also have an incredible daughter who is a junior in high school. I look forward to transitioning with my wife and daughter here in the coming months and making arrangements for the rest of the family and friends to visit this beautiful state.

My career in corrections spans three decades. Over that time, corrections has evolved many times and each time, it's improved and adapted to the changing world around it. I honestly couldn't be prouder of the direction our entire country is headed in the areas of programming, rehabilitation, education, people building, reentry and restorative justice. Before this opportunity in Connecticut, I was appointed by Utah Governor, Gary Herbert, to the Executive Director over the Utah Department of Corrections in April 2013. I humbly served in that position until my retirement in May 2018.

As part of my service with the State of Utah, I worked in Salt Lake Corrections System for 23 years having jointed the county as a correctional officer in 1989 and working my way through the jail ranks from officer to corporal to sergeant, lieutenant capital and ultimately, I was appointed chief deputy. I continuously strive to keep corrections' employees my highest priority and have guided a variety of initiatives aimed at empowering staff, building servant leaders, improving safe work environments and staff wellness. Few jobs are more difficult and unsung than that of a correctional officer or a parole officer. We want to have a strong and effective criminal justice system. It is
imperative that all of our corrections' professionals receive proper training, resources, recognition for their work and opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Throughout my career I focused heavily on evidence-based treatment for offenders as an avenue to humanely help them overcome struggles and addictions. This approach improves public safety and assists those in our criminal justice system successfully reintegrate into our communities and enable them to once again support their families and loved ones. As part of my career, I've had the fortunate opportunity to lead a team that transitioned an aging facility into a 2000-bed state of the art direct supervision facility creating an improved environment for both offender population and the staff as well as two other similar projects as chief and executive director.

In addition to my organizational experience, I worked as a criminal justice corrections and public safety consultant for more than a decade. I proudly worked for and collaborated with such criminal justice experts as the National Institute of Corrections, Vera, Pew, Association of State Correction Administrators, the Moss Group, and the Council of State Governments.

Again, I'm honored to have the opportunity to serve the citizens of Connecticut and to continue to build upon the tremendous accomplishments within criminal justice and corrections that have occurred over the past decade. Thank you for your consideration of my nomination. I look forward to working with all of you and answering any questions you may have.
REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, commissioner, for your initial statement. I've had an opportunity to meet with you and I'm very impressed with your background, your credentials and the fact that you’ve been a reformer in the whole field of corrections. As I stated earlier, our ranking Senate member has asked to go first on the agenda so he has the floor.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): Mr. Chairman, thank you very much for that courtesy. Welcome, Mr. Cook, Commissioner Cook, it's good to see you again. You and I have had at least two meetings. The first meeting we talked about the jail system and your background and what you’ve done for reforms, and I explained to you then that over the past eight months I've been very much involved with Commissioner Semple and the changes that he has made for the better, but equally important, the deaths of inmates as the result of inadequate care by UConn Medical on a no-bid contract that resulted in deaths of inmates for lack of medical care, and that is why I have asked to go first. Because you and I had a conversation, we talked about that. You told me you were prepared to take on that role which is the transition from UConn Medical to State Run Medical, being prison run medical and you’ve had that opportunity to do that in the past, and then an email was sent out, a flyer was sent out, I know you're well aware of the flyer.

ROLLIN COOK: I am.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): And in the flyer, there's certain, I'm going to say accusations perhaps that are up there that came out which led me to make some
calls to Utah to make sure I got the information that they had and it wasn’t twisted in a way that perhaps was not as it appears to be. And in our business, unfortunately, sometimes perception can be reality and facts get left behind.

ROLLIN COOK: Sure, I understand.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): So with respect to the flyer/email that's been passed around this building, not in the order of the email, but in the order that I would like to take it up, one of the first items I'd like to talk to you about, there was a hearing on a death penalty where a prisoner killed another prisoner and the prisoner was found guilty of murder and associated crimes, and the question was whether or not that person would be put to death or life in prison and as most of us know, in a death penalty case you have two issues, the liability and then the sentencing.

ROLLIN COOK: Right.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): And in the sentencing aspect of it, there was a request for medical information because a, you asked for that because there could be exculpatory information or some issue in there that would diminish the death penalty and get life in prison and apparently, when the request was made to the prison where this defendant was cared for, it was asking for all records, and this was actually subpoenaed or requested in a court order by Judge Lee, and the number of documents that came were woefully in adequate. At the hearing of the death penalty, the prosecutor said I'm not gonna go forward on the death penalty because we don’t have,
we didn’t get all the information necessary so the defendant's counsel could prepare, took the death penalty off the table, became life imprisonment, and then the discussion with the judge and I believe a lawyer from the Correctional DOC showed up and a discussion ensued, why didn’t we get the medical records.

I did get the transcript of that hearing, which I have in front of me, and I've read it a few times. Clearly, the records weren’t given.

ROLLIN COOK: That's true.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): Some 1500 pieces of records were missing and that would be every record. They took his temperature, to cut finger, whatever it is. Every single record was being asked for. It was a mistake. Would you care to explain --

ROLLIN COOK: Sure.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): What happened and then I'll ask you other questions, but if you could just explain why the 1500 pages were not supplied.

ROLLIN COOK: So to start with, the reason, you're exactly right, the reason there's 1500 pages is this particular inmate had been with us for quite a while and every document, every time that the inmate receives either medication or any sort of treatment whatsoever, so if he was receiving Tylenol or anything, all of those things are documented. When the request came into our records folks, there's actually two sets of records folks there in Utah. One is in the medical unit and one's just a part of the administration side.
When that request came in for those documents, when the clerk made the decision in regard to what all documents meant, there had been previous times, we didn’t know that at the time until we looked at it, but the way that she was looking at it is sometimes when they would ask for something, when they wanted the entire file, based on her interpretation of HIPAA and different things like that and depending on whether it was a court order, whether it was a subpoena, whether it was somebody else asking for it, they would choose, or be able to choose from a list of different documents that they would provide.

In this particular case, that clerk did not provide all of the documents that you have described so when it was sent to them to use as part of the case, it was recognized at that point and they notified us that they were not going to be able to proceed with the death penalty. As soon as we found that out, we immediately tried to investigate what was going on in that particular area. We found that there was obviously significant training issues going on in regard to HIPAA, in regard to records access. We had some policy challenges.

The other concern we had was that this could possibly have happened to other court cases so we went back through, I believe we went back five years looking at all the different records requests that were similar in nature to this and then contacted the prosecutors and the defense attorneys in that regard to see if any of that had ever affected their cases. When I left there at that time, none had any additional challenges in that particular area.
SEN. FASANO (34TH): And, if I can refer to the transcript at that time, counselor for DOC said that the clerk was trying to follow a check list to protect the privacy as this clerk understood the Federal Privacy Laws would apply to medical records, and then provided the records that felt comfortable in providing as a result of a check list that was prepared for disclosure of medical records. Is that accurate?

ROLLIN COOK: That's accurate and I would tell that I felt like, as I mentioned, there was policies and lack of training that I felt like we as an organization had failed that person to be able to manage that situation effectively. If she, to me, the clerk managed it the way that she thought it should have been handled.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): And in addition to that, you said you’ve put in a corrective measure, is that correct, to make sure this doesn’t happen?

ROLLIN COOK: Right. So then, we updated our polices, we went back through and trained all of our records clerks in both of those units that I talked about. They may have even combined those units at this point. I'm not sure if they’ve done that. There was some discussion so that we'd have some consistency across the board. There was also some double and triple checks that were put in place so that supervisors and managers would have the opportunity to be able to review those requests to make sure that we were meeting the standards that are required.
SEN. FASANO (34TH): Now, I also want to note that there was an issue regarding, that was not brought up in the, at least not initially in this email, but some of the doctors who were being questioned by the defense counselors were not necessarily working with the defense counsel, but those folks had their own private lawyers as I understand it; is that correct?

ROLLIN COOK: That's correct. So there was some conflict there that their private lawyers were advising them not to comment on and so again, we tried to address that issue with them and anyway, there was plenty of challenges that came out of that particular incident.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): And Judge Lee at some point, obviously was very upset and he was debating whether, you could tell from the transcript, whether to issue what's called a show cause hearing, show why it wasn't complied with. Counsel for DOC made certain representations and some of that representation was there'd be a new checklist, there'd be a new procedure and you have complied with that, correct?

ROLLIN COOK: We did.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): And I think on the same day that this came out, well let me ask you when the judge's order came for these records, did anybody bring that order directly to your attention and say, hey, you know we got this order, what do we do? Was that ever brought directly to your attention at the time it was served?

ROLLIN COOK: No, no, that wouldn’t come to my attention. That was being handled by our record's
department so that would be something that they would regularly handle.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): So you came in, so you found out about it afterwards and that's when you --

ROLLIN COOK: Yeah, I found out about it when it was becoming a problem.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): And then I think on the same day of the hearing, which was March 28, 2018, you issued a press release on March 28, 2018 in which you recognized this problem, said you were going to correct it, apologized for the problem, and then started your changes right after that; is that correct?

ROLLIN COOK: Correct. I think that's what you have to do. You have to accept responsibility and you have to try to find ways to ensure that it doesn't happen again so that's what we did and we tried to be transparent. We didn't try to hide and I also didn't want to put the clerk in a bad position so that's, we, I took responsibility.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): And there's ever been a show cause hearing by this judge that he's not happy with whatever corrective measures were taken.

ROLLIN COOK: Not that I've been invited to.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): He did write a scathing letter on April 3, which my understanding is based upon what happened which is understandable why he was upset, and my understanding is that the letter was addressed by the governor or somebody in Utah back to the judge explaining the situation and sort of saying hey, look, we got this; is that accurate?
ROLLIN COOK: That's accurate.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): Now, one of the other questions I wanna ask you that came up on this was, um, there's an issue of saying that from 2004, um, to 2012, but I thought it was a different time period, but anyway, there's been 78, 71 deaths behind, in the jail system. Now, in Connecticut, we don't have a county system, uh, we don't have county government, but in Utah there's some sort of county government; is that correct?

ROLLIN COOK: That's correct.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): And you have, uh, there was a time in which, back when, the prison population for state prisoners was high and I guess there was some decision not to build more prisons, but to move that state prison population to the county jails. Is that a rough representation of what happened?


SEN. FASANO (34TH): Real rough or just a little rough?

ROLLIN COOK: No, it's a little rough, but that's okay.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): Okay.

ROLLIN COOK: I can clarify it if you want, but --

SEN. FASANO (34TH): Please. What year was that?

ROLLIN COOK: So that was 1987 that the original contract began between the state and the counties and the initial intent was to avoid having to build
more state prisons, especially when for example there were counties that were needing jails built so the state helped the counties by funding and placing state inmates or agreeing to place state inmates in those facilities which helps facilitate the payment on the bonds and all those different kinds of things. That was the original intent of that contract.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): And then as time went on, the prison population went down, my understanding is, right? And when you took over you even consolidated prisons to reduce the prisons; is that accurate? Number of beds maybe is a better way of saying it?

ROLLIN COOK: That's correct. So we closed about 500 beds and two facilities, but we were still required to keep the number of inmates up inside those county jails to whatever was agreed to in the contract.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): And one of the reasons I'm thinking because of what you said is that the money for the prisoner would go to the county so that's revenue for the county to help the county government from either raising taxes or going into default on things.

ROLLIN COOK: That's correct.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): And so when they talk about 71 deaths behind the prison, would that include, let me ask this before I ask that. What is your jurisdiction with respect to the day-to-day ongoing operations of the county jail system as, when you had the role in Utah?
ROLLIN COOK: Okay so between 2004 and 2012, based on what the flyer's saying, so I was the Chief of Corrections for Salt Lake County. So at that time, I was responsible for one jail, the Salt Lake County Jail. There's 29 counties in Utah and I think 26 of them have jails so each one of those jails is run by a sheriff so they're all different. So when they're saying 71 of them died behind bars and I was, you know, responsible for all those, I'm not sure the sheriffs would agree with that for sure. The only jail I'm responsible for during that time is the Salt Lake County Jail.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): Okay. Um, there was a um, well let me continue on with this.

ROLLIN COOK: Okay.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): They also seem to state from 2013 to 2018, you were the person overseeing the system and as of 2017, Utah had the highest number of inmate deaths in the country. I know you've read that and this morning I asked you about that. It's my understanding they just took the percentage, 'cause you don't have 100,000 prisoners --

ROLLIN COOK: Right.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): And extrapolate to 100,000 so through numbers kind of got that number up there if I may, right?

ROLLIN COOK: Yeah, that's correct. I guess the thing I would add to that, I mean I agree that's a challenge, but those numbers, still, one number is not a good thing, but yes, that's exactly the
challenge we had because of the way that they did the statistical analysis.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): In the state prison system run by you, in 2017 there were 20 deaths, 15 of which were illness, 2 of which were suicide, 2 of which were alcohol, drugs intoxication and one was unknown. Fifteen on illness kind of red flags the issue for me. Can you, um, as we talked about earlier, can you explain the 15 to illness in 2017?

ROLLIN COOK: So from that group of 15 that was, that you're talking about, basically the natural causes so it's those that are passing away from age, from cancer, from heart disease and different things like that. One of the challenges that we have there in Utah is we have a very, one-third of our population in Utah is sex offenders and they made significant changes to the sentencing in Utah back in, I think the late 90s that required very, very long sentences for many of these sex offenders to ensure that they not get out.

So we have a high population of geriatric people in our facilities. When they started to look at those numbers again, I left by the time that they were at the point where they were trying to figure out what we could do to fix which is awesome. I'm glad that they were continuing to do as they've always done is address it. One of the things that they found out at that time is that our population of those inmates that were 60 years of age or older had increased 397 percent between 2000 and 2018. Those that we had from 70-plus years had increased by 400 percent so one thing we do know, and we were always challenged with it is the number of geriatric folks that we
have. When you break them down, we had two suicides and two overdose alcohol, one was, I think one was where they make their own alcohol inside the facility. The other one was some sort of contraband that had been smuggled in, in methamphetamine form. That's what I know of those 20.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): I wanna talk about two cases that I came across, one of which is noted, both of which I should say are noted. There's a Lindsey Googin.

ROLLIN COOK: Goggin.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): Goggin, sorry, and in that case you were sued and in what's called a summary judgement, my understanding is you were found by this district court, you and others, a whole bunch of others, not to have any liability so that case was basically, with respect to you and as I say others, but you're the one before us, um, the court found no legal responsibility as I read that case. The second case is, you're gonna have to help me out with this name cause I'll butcher it, uh, Uma?

ROLLIN COOK: It's Ume, I believe it was Carlos Umama.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): And in that case, um, that case, uh, why don’t you tell. That's the one that as I remember it was a prisoner who starved to death. Um, this was a prisoner who was brought in. He had some mental health issues. He believed his food was being poisoned by somebody and therefore, refused to eat the food. Do you recall those events?
ROLLIN COOK: I do.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): And can you describe what medical attention that prisoner received when they were in the care and custody?

ROLLIN COOK: Sure. So this particular inmate continued to, um, digress or get worse and worse. So he began in general population and eventually was moved up into our mental health area of the correctional facility where they can be obviously closely monitored for their mental health and also even more closely monitored for their medical challenges. Throughout his stay there, again he continued to decline. He was having a visit with his family. His family was notifying the jail. They noticed those challenges and stuff, that he was declining as well both physically and mentally.

Our medical staff and our sworn staff responded to those questions and those inquiries the best that they possibly could. Our medical staff continued to do their regular checks. They did everything that they could do as far as checking vitals, those types of things. The thing that we didn’t have at the time was an order to, to be able to get a court order to force feed an inmate and at that time, that would’ve been probably something that saved his life and it wouldn’t have been easy to do. He was, he was violent at times whenever staff would try to interact with him and things like that.

But the, I guess the thing I would tell you is the last part of his life, a correctional officer contacted our health department, I mean our health services folks, he just walked by and just said
Carlos is not doing well. You’ve got to come over here and see him, I'm concerned. The medical, the nurse, you can see it on the video, the nurse goes and looks and talks to him. Carlos comes up to the window and talks to her. Uh, I'm not sure what the conversation was. After she spends some time there, I don't remember how long with him and then she walks off and uh, 15 minutes later our officers find Carlos behind his toilet dead and then began to administer CPR to try and save his life and they weren’t successful and it affects everybody. I mean I can tell you it's horrible to tell a family that. It's horrible for an officer, I mean as an officer, as a correctional officer I told you in my opening statement, I've cut people down who are trying to hang themselves. They're blue and you pull them down and you're providing the CPR. It affects the officers that are doing that. It affects the medical staff who tried to provide the care. If we lose one person like we lost Carlos, it's horrible. It's horrible for everybody.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): And as a result of that incident at least what I'm researching last night is a bill was then passed by the Utah Assembly to force feed inmates who decide to starve themselves giving you permission as DOC, which apparently obviously didn’t exist before so there's nothing you could do before unless you went to court I guess, but this would give Utah the right to intercede where, with medical advice where somebody's starving themselves and puts them in the threat of death that you can, however it worked out, I don't remember the details,
but force feed a patient, sorry a prisoner. Is that correct?

ROLLIN COOK: That's correct so it's just like, unfortunately people end up dying at an intersection before they'll put up a light and um, but yes so that's the good thing is that now we're able to force feed them if they force to get to that.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): And prior to that bill, there was no effort that you could’ve done, that you knew within the confines of the law to help Carlos out.

ROLLIN COOK: That's correct.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): There's something in here that's called pay for stay. As I understand that was a program in Utah that, um, once again I'll probably do this rough again, but that prisoners pay or get a bill for some stay in some prisons. It was a bill that was passed by the General Assembly. It came under some scrutiny when one of the towns decided to, uh, or counties decided to charge for someone who, uh, was not found guilty, but was held for whatever reason and then maybe they, the case was dismissed or what have you, but they would bill that person in Davis County Jail and that judge came in and as a result of that, said you can't do it Davis County, but it still exists other places in Utah as I understand it. It says on this flyer that, uh, LinkedIn profile, that you established the Pay for Stay. Is that an accurate statement?

ROLLIN COOK: Um, well it's, let me provide context to that. So it didn’t go to the General Assembly. Each one of the different counties again did things differently so there was discussion in Salt Lake
County about a possible way to be able to offset some of the costs that were being incurred by municipalities that were sending people to serve long sentences in the jail without having to pay for that. They, there was, there were some political challenges there and some things going on so Salt Lake County's model that was decided on, it wasn’t something I was going to the council to say this is what I want. I didn’t have that kind of position at the time. I was chief at the time.

The council and the sheriff at the time decided and voted on that model in that the model that Salt Lake County would use is that they would only charge those that were being sentenced by the municipalities to do, um, between 30-60 days, um, as part of a conviction, a commitment. So they're committed to go to the jail by the Justice Court for those amount of days to try and incur money to pay for the incarceration. There were tons of, as you can imagine, I mean that takes away from the person that's convicted, their ability to pay victim's funds, their ability to pay fines. It was pretty controversial. The bottom line is it passed.

I was asked to put something like that together so myself and my team put together what I just described to you. What we tried to do is try to put in some things that would, if they would for example pay it up front, they could get half of it. If they would participate in programming, depending on how much programming they could knock out within that amount of time, we'd take time off of their sentence. So it was a very small population that was dealing with some, I hate the term, it's what it
was, dealing with some politics in Utah between municipalities, counties and state and yes, I, the reason it's on my LinkedIn is it's one of those that shows I was given a difficult task in a government-related item, and I performed it and got it going and we did. We got it going. To say that they were, it was embarrassing to me to see that they were somehow charging everybody that would go into jail made absolutely no sense. Whether, and that was a different county, I don't know what they did to get to that and I don't know if Salt Lake County still uses the Pay for Stay. Again, that was 2005. There is so much that's changed in this world and criminal justice. I, I'd be blown away if they still are, but maybe they are. I don't know.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): So essentially government at county or whatever level gave you a task and you work for them and you had to come up with a way to implement the task they gave you essentially.

ROLLIN COOK: We did.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): Okay. And with all the things that have happened from 2017 and before, um, there was a Senate bill 205 that came up and that Senate bill 205, if I'm correct, was a bill to look at the prison system and put together a group of people to review the prison system and find out pluses and minuses. Were you a part of that?

ROLLIN COOK: So I wasn’t part of that because I left. I was part of something that occurred before that led to those things. Would you like me to explain that?

SEN. FASANO (34TH): Please.
ROLLIN COOK: So there was concerns over inspections and jail standards that were being used by the Department of Corrections and Utah Sheriff's Association to be able to evaluate their jails. There was a request for us to release those standards and those inspections. What this thing never talks about in here is I have been an advocate for transparency from the very beginning and I was doing the same thing. I said okay, let's release them. I thought at the time those standards belonged to the Department of Corrections or to the State. I was wrong. Those standards belonged to an individual person who owned those standards and when I got ready to release them, I received notice from that particular person that no you won't release them. They, you know, are his property and he was correct. I pulled the contract. The State had contracted with that person for those standards and they were protected.

So we couldn’t work through being able to get those standards released and he had his reasons that he could argue here. He's incredible at that, at arguing and doing those types of things so I said well fine, we're out.

And I said we're going to write our own policies. We're gonna have our own standards. We're gonna have our own inspection process and in part of that process, we're gonna involve the ACLU, the Disability Loss Center. There was also a group that was called, in Utah, I'm sure it's still there called UPAN, that was Families of Incarcerated. They could help us review those policies. I also said as part of the inspection process, the ACLU,
Disability Loss Center could provide people to be part of that process. We met with the sheriffs soon after that because I made that public. We met with the sheriffs to see if they would like to do something similar because I think they were feeling uncomfortable about not being able to release that information and they decided to join us in that because I said if any state inmate that's gonna be housed in a county jail is going to be managed by our standards and inspections.

They joined in, partnered in, in good faith, but I want you to understand they also have their own inspections and standards and they were going to maintain those with that gentleman. I think I'm forgetting something, but, so we put those, uh, we began that process long before I left and I'm assuming by now that's probably in place, but again, I don't have control of that and so we wanted to be more transparent and that was the way we were headed and so that should be in the, in fact, I know that they wrote stories about that as well. So that's that.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): And I have picked up on a few of those stories. I had confused the 205, but I have picked up on a few of those stories so just, Mr. Chairman, as I sum up here, basically, the 20 deaths with respect to the prison, 15 of them were illnesses and as you say, the older prisoners who've been there for some time based upon the stricter laws that keep these folks in there for a long time, that the record issue was not to your attention. When you found out about it, you put corrective actions into place. The Goggin issue, you were
cleared of any issue there. On the Carlos issue, we talked about that. You were left with not much you could do and that is why the legislature spoke and said let me give you some tools which are now available, but weren’t available back then.

I would also point out that when you talked about, and you and I talked about the reforms that you were all in favor of doing at these prisons, I would just like to point out that when you left Utah, I would like to just see if these statements, the ACLU of Utah said he was always responsive to our concerns about health, safety and housing of inmates as well as favoring increased transparency of prison policies and conditions. We hope to continue the same shared goals with your successor. That's from the ACLU of Utah. With respect to the Utah Prisoner Advocacy Network, the UPAN you talked about, which are families of prisoners, when you left, they said, they described you as a great partner in addressing the needs of inmates and their families and applaud the expansion of education and treatment programs on his watch. Director Cook was always open to differing perspectives and was willing to work towards a greater good even when we may have disagreed on the approach, he took the helm during a period of tremendous challenges and did his best to steer UDC in a direction compatible with criminal justice reform in Utah.

That's when you were leaving. That's when most people will take shots at you, when they know that you're done and here are two groups that we're talking about that speak on the advocacy of prisoners giving you applaud so with respect to this
email that's been circulated around and the handout, you know you can take anything out of this context in this building and make it look bad. I'm glad you had the opportunity to talk about it and I'm going to be very proud to stand up and support your position of Commissioner of DOC. Welcome to the State of Connecticut and I know being married 33 years myself, being separated for that long a period of time has got to be a strain on you and the family which I know you're close to.

ROLLIN COOK: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you. We've been joined by the Senate Vice-Chair who also happens to be our Senator President Pro Tem, Senator Looney, would you care to have the floor?

SEN. LOONEY (11TH): Yes, just briefly. Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome, Commissioner. I appreciated the opportunity to have an extensive discussion with you in my office the other day. Thank you so much for coming in. I think you have exactly the right approach to an enlightened approach to corrections here in Connecticut following on and building in many ways upon the initiatives of Commissioner Semple, and we certainly welcome you to that position and have every confidence in you.

ROLLIN COOK: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Any other? Senator Moore, you have the floor.

SEN. MOORE (22ND): Thank you. Congratulations on your nomination.

ROLLIN COOK: Thank you, ma'am.
SEN. MOORE (22ND): I just have a few questions. I've not had the opportunity to meet with you, but I'd like to ask you about, um, you have a private business, Rollin Cook Consulting? Can you share a little bit about what you do and its core values?

ROLLIN COOK: Sure. So, and that was in that email as well. So the entire time that I was the executive director for the Department of Corrections, I didn’t do any of that work including and also when I'm here, I won't do any of that work. It began from my standpoint, I was responsible for opening a 2000-bed facility a long time ago and I gained some knowledge in how to do that and the National Institute of Corrections contacted me and asked me to be one of their consultants and then it just kind of grew from there so when I retired, actually when I left the sheriff's office as chief, my goal was that I was gonna go out and, uh, and do the consulting thing. In fact, I go around the country and teach a lot of different things in regard to corrections including going in and looking at operations, staffing, lots of things like that. Before I got a call a year into that and asked if I would go to Utah, same thing here. So I guess what I'm telling you is I've worked with the Moss Group, different places like that as part of a consulting business so is it something that I own or that I'm the only person that does it and you have to have your license to be able to do those types of things, to apply for federal jobs and all those different kinds of things. So does that answer your question?

SEN. MOORE (22ND): So are you the only employee?

ROLLIN COOK: Yes.
SEN. MOORE (22ND): Do you still have that business?

ROLLIN COOK: I do still have that business and I maintain the license.

SEN. MOORE (22ND): Do you have any intention to continue to do it in Connecticut while you're here?

ROLLIN COOK: No, ma'am.

SEN. MOORE (22ND): And you also mentioned in your opening, restorative justice. Can you give me some examples of what you’ve done in the way of restorative justice?

ROLLIN COOK: Well, you know, a couple of things. I can't say that we've done a whole lot in Utah in that regard because restorative justice is sort of the next step from some of the reforms and things that we're doing here. I think the closest thing in Utah that falls in line with that particular piece is that we implemented something similar to the TRUE Unit. Unfortunately, the part, for example, that falls into the restorative justice piece is the mentor piece that you’ve added here in Connecticut. We didn’t have that but we had all the other types of things that were associated with that. Also, we changed, for example, our correctional industries program from being something that just keeps inmates busy to reaching out to the community and bringing employers in to help us certify inmates in areas that they can build careers whether it's in welding or in construction trades and different things like that.

Restorative justice though also, again we weren’t doing that in Utah, but as far along as Connecticut
is, is where we start to involve the victims in the process. We also began, for example, the things you're doing in the TRUE Unit where the inmates are engaged and involved in the discussions about what sort of things are going to help them on the outside. Bringing those to the table, for example, that have been through the system and have found ways to be successful in life. Again, those are the types of things that I'm hoping Connecticut is ready to take those next steps.

There are not a lot of states or agencies across the country that have taken that next step. Where you see a lot of this is in places like in Europe, whether it's Germany or Norway, where they're starting to normalize the things, instead of it being about being confined, it's about getting people ready to be strong members of our community so I can't tell you that I've done a ton of it, but I do know which direction I want us to go.

SEN. MOORE (22ND): And so the finally, do you know Senator Howard Stevenson from Utah?

ROLLIN COOK: I do know of him, yes.

SEN. MOORE (22ND): So I met him. He talked about the laws that he enacted during his terms of service and he retired this year because he realized how much damage he has done to society with some of the laws that he has enacted over the course of his tenure and so I know we make mistakes and we put laws in place sometimes that do harm. I'm hoping that anything that's happened in the past, that you've learned from that and you'll be able to bring
it here to Connecticut and do justice to the people that we serve.

ROLLIN COOK: Thank you. I hope I can too. The piece in regard to corrections is always challenging. It feels like you're constantly under a negative pull and that's one of the things that drew me to Connecticut. Again, I was done, ma'am. I thought I was retired and I never thought that six months later I'd be traveling across the country but to pass up the opportunity to work her in Connecticut would’ve been crazy because I want to make a difference. I want to do those things because they work so.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Senator Moore. Yes, Representative Davis.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Cook or Commissioner Cook for being here. One of the issues that I spent a lot of time here as the ranking member of the Finance Committee is on the state budget and over the last several years, we've been able to cut down on overtime costs for the State of Connecticut. Unfortunately, last year, year over year from 2017 to 2018, the Department of Corrections has seen an increase in overtime and it tends to be the driving factor for overtime costs for the State of Connecticut, the largest one agency with that. I'm just wondering, from your position as the Commissioner of the Department, what kind of things are you going to be looking to do to cut down on overtime costs that go above and beyond budget?

ROLLIN COOK: So I wish, Representative Davis, I'd had enough time to come up with those particular
solutions for our organization. One of the things I can tell though is from the, I think from the first week, that was brought to my attention, that this was something we would need to address and we immediately began to pull the numbers and to look at what sort of, where staffing is strong, where it's struggling and different things like that. So, I would tell you, I don't have an answer for you today, but that's something that I can get back to you. The thing I would say that I want you to understand, and I know you know this, but as a correctional officer myself, what tends to happen is you end up relying on your overtime to be able to make your living. If you're not doing overtime, then you're trying to do multiple jobs which pulls you away from your family and so on. So, the one thing I do know is it's a balance of trying to make sure that we're not using overtime in excess and usually we can find that, and what I hope that I'll also be able to do is to work with the unions and you know come up with some possible solutions that they would be in agreement with as well. So, I apologize I don’t have any answers for you today, but you have my word that we will work on it and that we already are.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Thank you, yeah, and I appreciate that. I know you're only a few weeks on the job so it is a major issue that past commissioners have been dealing with for years so I don’t necessarily expect you to have the solution right away, but I'm certainly glad to hear that you are paying attention to it and looking forward to how you plan on tackling that issue. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.
REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Davis. Senator Witkos, you have the floor.

SENATOR WITKOS (8TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon, Commissioner. Just a quick question. If you could just describe to me what kind of drug rehabilitation programs you offered in Utah and if you've had the opportunity to see what we have here in Connecticut. What new programs you would implement or change because one of the things I'm hearing about is when our inmates leave the State of Connecticut, leave the correctional facilities, they can't apply for Medicaid until they're out and so there's a gap between when they can get the coverage to get the methadone and there's a lot of relapse within that first 30 days. That's a concern of mine so I didn't know if you could explain to me, you know, what did you offer in Utah? What do you see you could potentially do here in Connecticut?

ROLLIN COOK: Sure, so one of the first things that you need to know is that Utah was one of those non-Medicaid states so when I heard that again, I was coming to Connecticut, I lit up that maybe we would have some hope that would help us. From Utah's standpoint, we were struggling with the same things as far as not having the resources in the communities once they leave our facilities.

From a facility standpoint, when you ask me what sort of things did you do, we had three or four different therapeutic community models which is where the inmates are housed in units, dormitory style, where they're engaged constantly in regard to the rehabilitation and programming stuff. There, we
were seeing significant decreases in recidivism from those particular units; however, Utah honestly was struggling with some of the same things because we didn’t have the resources in the community. I'm surprised though to hear that.

I have been absolutely, and I don’t use the word bombarded because that makes it sound negative, I have so many meetings coming up to meet with people from community that have resources that they want to help provide, so I think honestly and again, I wish I had a magic bullet to tell you. The magic bullet is in the people that are probably in this room and that are listening to this particular hearing, of pulling them together and figuring out what sort of things we can do to improve that process, but I don’t have a magic thing other than I know I've never seen anything like it as far as people willing to come forward and wanting to help in those particular areas in regard to not only drug rehabilitation, but housing and reentry and all those types of things so again, I feel as if I'm not giving you an answer, but that's kind of what I see since I've been here.

SENATOR WITKOS (8TH): No I think you did in an off-handed way I guess by saying that you know people are already reaching out to you, wanting to communicate with you, want to assist you in being the best commissioner that you can be here in the State of Connecticut so that's a great start and you know, you're in one of the professions that we say we'd almost like to put you out of a job by having no prison population but it's a necessary evil if you will and I thank you and applaud you for your
time spent in doing that. I spent my career on the other side of law enforcement and I just couldn’t imagine being in the position you're in all those number of years. So I wish you the best and congratulations on your nomination as commissioner and if there's anything that we can do on our end to help you out, please know that we're always here ready, willing and able to assist you as well.

ROLLIN COOK: Thank you.

SENATOR WITKOS (8TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): The Chair recognizes Senator Formica.

SEN. FORMICA (20TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon, sir. Welcome.

ROLLIN COOK: Thank you.

SEN. FORMICA (20TH): Thank you for your patience. I live in and represent the 20th district which is outside of the state near New London and we have a number of facilities under your control there. York for Women and Gates, which has been shuttered for a number of years and I know it's probably premature for you to talk a little bit about consolidations, but consolidations are particularly important as the populations declines obviously, as the dollars are being looked at, but in our neck of the woods, believe it or now, sewer capacity is tied to surrounding communities and there's a number of gallons per day allocated to the facilities that, a number of state facilities within probably a quarter mile of Gates. You know we have Rocky Neck State Park and a number of other things so I know that
Representative Davis mentioned, he talked a little bit about how you control overtime and how you do things like that, and I understand you're looking at that, but have you been able to look at, specifically in your short time here, consolidations or is that agenda and specifically, has the issue of the sewer situation been looked at from your point of view yet?

ROLLIN COOK: So it's interesting that you bring up the sewer question because we did have that particular challenge in Utah. We had a large correctional facility that was in a very small town so I understand that challenge completely. We have already begun to look at what is the best possible way to organize our offender population and it's truly a balance of trying to make sure that we don't shut down facilities that are conducive to helping us with reform efforts and with rehabilitation and education.

Many of the older facilities are not designed to be able to provide space to do those types of things and so it's a balance between shutting down beds which we all want to do, it's extremely costly and it's a great thing. I don't mind being put out of business. I'm at that point where it would be great to retire, I keep telling myself that, but it's about a balance. And we are looking at those particular issues because the numbers had still continued to decline.

Now, I understand the prison population has leveled out, but what I will tell you is that we're already looking at those types of things. If we face budget cuts, what are we going to do, how will we manage
those things and again, I just want to make sure you understand, just another comes to mind for me is we have challenges right now facing the way that we manage our juveniles in our facilities so it’s a balance of trying to figure out what sort of facilities we can continue to run, and what sort of facilities we can shut down to be most effective. So that will be part of what we do obviously in this budget season and for years to come.

SEN. FORMICA (20TH): Thank you for that. And we have a number of great programs at York that are trying to make sure that recidivism is not higher and coming back and they seem to be working and York being the only female facility, it's wonderful, I know we have to keep that going. But Gates from a sewer allocation perspective, I think takes on a different meaning. I know you're charged with doing what you do and all of that.

ROLLIN COOK: I understand.

SEN. FORMICA (20TH): But the communities along the beaches there are really struggling for this allocation and so I just wanted to not so much get an answer from you today, but kind of you know put it on your radar so that if we're not going to open Gates, and it's been closed for four or five years, you know let's make a determination so that we can move forward and repurpose that property for something and perhaps, you know, kill two birds with one stone if we can.

ROLLIN COOK: Specifically to that comment I can feel them looking at me over there. So we did talk about Gates yesterday and I was informed that it's
basically at the point where it couldn’t be reopened. Everything's been shut down to it so early indications that this wouldn’t be one that we would be able to reopen anyway.

SEN. FORMICA (20TH): Okay. And I note over there you have some great people behind you which was noted by the previous commissioner. I'm happy to note the great people that you have behind you I've had the opportunity to work with in my time a little bit here so good luck to you and thank you for your time and if I can be of any assistance in regard to background information on that allocation and how that may be helpful to our communities in that perspective, I'd be happy to send you some information or meet with you as you get to that point in your service Connecticut.

ROLLIN COOK: Great, thank you.

SEN. FORMICA (20TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Senator Formica. My vice-chair, Representative Phipps has the floor.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Good afternoon.

ROLLIN COOK: Good afternoon, sir.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Welcome to Connecticut and I think you for giving us your time to answer several questions and state your case. You talked about racial justice with Senator Moore so I won't ask more questions about that. You're well aware of the class action suit regarding providing medical treatment to our inmates, and can you talk more about how you would ensure that all of our, all
those that you serve will receive the medical care that they're entitled to.

ROLLIN COOK: Well one of the first things we, within the first few days that I was here, when you start to make your way, I heard about many great things going on in Connecticut so the first thing I'm starting to wonder is, okay, so what are the challenges. And that was one of the first things that was discussed was the challenges that are going on there in health services. I believe honestly, and I had to do this in Utah.

When I got to Utah, they were having challenges in their medical unit and health service as well and I believe that one of the first things we do is you bring in a consultant to take a look at what you're currently doing. Obviously, the things that we have been doing have not been right. What things are we doing right, what things are we doing wrong, and provide us some input that way. That way, we can start new.

The other thing is what model is going to serve best. I think Connecticut has had both models where they had someone from outside the organization providing that medical care, and then someone from inside now is taking it on ourselves. It would be good to know from an outside perspective what is the best model. I know we had a consultant that case in and helped them with the transition of that piece so that's one of the first things that comes to mind.

The other thing is that we need to get, they don't have it yet, they don't have a chief medical officer. That particular position is extremely
important in managing the treatment of those inmates. One of the things I was informed of just the other day is we finally got three finalists for that position so that's one of those things that we would want to make sure that we're ramping up.

I think the other piece is that you, I hope that the consultant will be talking about a committee that takes a look at not only the treatment as it happens from day to day, but also looking at cases in a broader spectrum about what sort of things are we seeing inside of our facilities, what sort of things can we be treating preventatively rather than waiting for things to get worse. One of the challenges when you work in, or that we have people in a correctional facility is sometimes they're not taking care of themselves and we're not providing maybe the care that is necessary to prevent some of those things, so that would be initially another thought. We're also down I'm told about 90 staff. We need to make sure that we've got proper staffing to make sure that they're able to go out and take care of the triage and see people on a regular basis.

So those are some initial thoughts of how I would begin. I think the final piece is, one thing I noticed and maybe I missed this, I apologize if I did, but I don't believe that the Department of Corrections here in Connecticut is NCCHC certified. That is a national certification that ensures, and they came through every four years, and they ensure that you're providing the care, the documentation, the records, the preventative care. You're managing the inmate population the way that you're supposed
to that meets the national standard and obviously I know you know this Representative Phipps, this is the population, it's the only population that is guaranteed by the constitution to have that care. So it has to be of my highest priority that this is taken care of.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Thank you for that. And you specifically mentioned the director of, the chief medical officer. When do you expect to have that position filled by?

ROLLIN COOK: Well, I'm actually, I won't lie to you, next week I'm actually going to fly home for a week so it's going to be two weeks from now or it would have been next week. So we'll have a decision made at that time. That'll give me the chance to interview them. I want to have some say in that.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): And that's someone that was in an LDR for two, a long relationship for two years. I know how stressful that can be so I gotcha. I empathize with you. You talk about the how and the what of restorative justice. Can you talk more about the why? Like why do we need those sort of practices here in your work and in your line of business?

ROLLIN COOK: I hate to take the easy road, Representative, but it's because it's the right thing to do. It's the things that I think many of us had throughout our lives. It's the things such as mentoring. It's the thing about giving people opportunities maybe that didn't have them in the past. Not everyone has a choice, no one has a choice of who they're born to or who they're parents
are or what neighborhood they were born into. It's our responsibility as human beings to take care of other human beings that have maybe challenges that we didn’t experience ourselves. So when you ask me why, it's because it's the right thing to do. It's what I'm supposed to do as a fellow human being.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): What role do you think private prisons would have in the State of Connecticut?

ROLLIN COOK: Zero.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): What protections would you, that's the right answer, thank you.

ROLLIN COOK: You darn right it's the right answer. [laughter]

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): It's kind of cool that you [crosstalk].

ROLLIN COOK: I'm glad I got one right.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): I'm only I think only 29 days on the job and you don’t often get to use your platform for that so thank you for that.

ROLLIN COOK: You're welcome.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): I think our trans inmates are probably some of our most vulnerable in the community. How would your administration ensure that those folks are protected and what protection should be made or should be implemented that we don’t have in the State of Connecticut right now?

ROLLIN COOK: So I would tell you that that population also has a special place in my heart.
because I have someone in my family who is along those, who is gay and I have a special place in my heart is the first thing I would say. The second thing is that we would be utilizing the national, uh, what's the term, we would ensure that they are receiving the attention that they need to make sure that we're housing them in proper locations, to make sure that they're not being victimized not only by fellow inmates, but also by staff. You do that through proper training. You do that through proper housing and classification and address their challenges the very best way you can.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): And in Mr. Carlos Umama's case, and I'm probably pronouncing his name incorrectly.

ROLLIN COOK: Umama.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Two questions. One, what do you think, what would you have done differently or what should have been done differently and two, I think, the minority leader talked about that the law was changed that required forced feeding after that, do you think that is a fair and reasonable solution to what that problem was?

ROLLIN COOK: So what would I have done differently. One of the things that I learned from that particular episode was that I didn’t feel like I was receiving enough information about inmates that were struggling in regard to healthcare, someone that was really fragile. I didn’t know enough about Carlos Umama until it was too late so I felt like it was, one of the things I learned is that I needed to be more involved and I required regular updates by our
Chief Medical Officer as to those top cases. I also began to attend some of the morbidity and mortality meetings which occur after an inmate dies to make sure that I knew exactly what was going on in each one of those deaths.

With the morbidity and mortality, again, that's one of those NCCHC requirements. It's a meeting after where you discuss those things. What was the second question, Representative Phipps? The law change?

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): The law was changed that would allow for forced feeding? Do you think that was a reasonable solution to that problem?

ROLLIN COOK: It's a reasonable solution, but it's a difficult solution. I think that's what a lot of people don’t understand. What that typically means is that you're going to have to enter that person's cell. Typically, they're not going to want to go willingly and you end up having to place them in restraints and then force feed somebody or do some sort of intravenous injection so it's extremely difficult. It's very traumatic but I think it's better than losing someone's life which we did.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Okay. For those that aren’t familiar with that procedure, I would definitely encourage you to watch on YouTube, Mos Def, who went through forced feeding and how long he lasted. So just for additional information. Um, what role do you think inmate voice should have, let me start off with a more general question.

ROLLIN COOK: In what role should inmates have?
REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Inmate voice so in other words their ability to advocate. I know I recognize that by definition many of their rights are foregone; however, I think in any community the ability to share your concerns and be able to be a self-advocate A makes everyone safer, um, but also empowers folks for what comes next. I think as we all know jail in no way prepares you for leaving and the ability to have no voice for that long is probably one of the bigger detriments including also losing the right to vote. So how would inmate voice play under your authority?

ROLLIN COOK: Well I guess I would turn to a couple of examples. So there were two major things that we needed to do in Utah, or at least a couple of challenges that we're facing in regard to gangs where our wardens actually sat down with the different gang members and discussed what sort of, what was going on with those inmates and talk about what sort of challenges or what things we could do better to alleviate some of the violence and different things like that. We also changed the way that we did restricted housing so again, we sat down with the inmates that were involved to get their input as far as what sort of things we would be implementing and putting into place. I think you see the same thing in the TRUE unit. It's the right thing to do. The other day when I was in there with the Governor walking through, they didn’t wait for me to say I was gonna meet with them. They said we wanna meet with you and my answer was, of course, we'll get that in as quickly as we possibly can.
So I think it's being open and being available to them to listen to their concerns. I think, I haven't done this before, but I know that there's also inmate councils that are put together that take an overall look at different things. For example, if there's racial disparity for example that's in policy or in some sort of practice or that is noticed in assessment or something, it would be great to have a council for them to be able to review stuff like that so that we can get some feedback from their point of view as to how we can improve it.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): You also had mentioned your work with ACLU. What other advocate organizations would you expect to work with here in Connecticut and what would that relationship and partnership look like?

ROLLIN COOK: Well to me, it expands, there's, as I mentioned, there was so many that I received. I mean, a couple that come to mind for me are the NAACP. They were touring TRUE just a little while ago and I was in some other required meeting so that would be one. I think the Urban League would be another. I think it would be awesome to have the opt to speak with the African American and Puerto Rican caucus to be able to spend some time and understand what sort of things they have concerns with. I know also religious folks in the community oftentimes can add a perspective and end up being a resource as well and again, I would be open to whatever those are. I hate to play the dumb guy role. I don’t know all of them, especially coming from Utah, but I would hope that they would be
reaching out to me saying we want your ear and more than just your ear, we want to see if there are things that you can do to help us and help those that we represent.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): And what other inner agencies do you look forward to working with and what sort of partnerships do you think are going to be created?

ROLLIN COOK: Well I hope that that's one of my strengths. I look forward to working with, for example, the Board of Pardons. I know Carlton and I have been trying to get together already to meet and just start to build that bridge a little bit. Sometimes those tendencies between parole and the board sometimes becomes eroded so I'm looking forward to building that. Also, even with the folks, for example, that were working with the Juvenile Justice System and the Office of Child Advocate, I would hope that those relationships continue to grow. Different agencies, for example, it would be great to have the law enforcement group at the table as well to hear what sort of concerns that have in regard to decisions that are made with our department and those that we're responsible for supervising. Anyway, I hope that's my strength is when I attend CJPAC, everyone that's around that circle I feel oftentimes I'm the new person and I don't know any of them so I have a lot of work to do to get around and introduce myself and be part of the solution.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): What unique challenges do you think you'll have in Connecticut when we're not quite the homogenous population that Utah has? I mean, I recognize that Salt Lake City has a pretty
large, like Hawaiian and Samoan population, but outside of that, I think it's going to be uniquely different, so how do you think those challenges will play out here in Connecticut?

ROLLIN COOK: Well I think it'll play out in a lot of different ways. In fact, you're kind of beating around the bush, but I saw when I was, when my name was first announced, I saw a radio person refer to, really? Rollin Clark coming from Utah, that's an awfully white state isn't it? And that really struck a chord with me because that's very true. What I can tell you is that although, for example, Utah may be a very white state. I've spent 30 years working the Department of Corrections or in jails and that population is very different. It isn't the same representation of the population that's out in the community every single day. So I do have some experience working that way. I think that also, I know this may not sound the same to you, but for example, I'm a Baptist, born and raised in Utah. There's [laughter], and Representative Phipps I'm married to a Catholic so, um, [laughter] and I'm married to a Hispanic and my daughter is Hispanic and American Indian, and I can go on and on and what I can tell you is that it's going to be important for me to listen, it's going to be important for me to be empathetic and to understand and to learn here while I'm here. I know that I'm the one that has to learn the most out of everyone in this state when I come here, but hopefully I'll be able to figure that out and if I don't, and if I don't, I'm sure there's gonna be people here that will straighten me out.
REP. PHIPPS (100TH): I really appreciate you coming in front of us. I think your not hearing, but this nomination process, I think came with probably some of the most concerns so I appreciate your frankness and I appreciate you giving us an opportunity to talk. Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Phipps. And yes, Senator Looney?

SENATOR LOONEY (11TH): Thank you, Commissioner. Just a couple of things I'd like to ask. I was late getting here because I was testifying in a public hearing in another committee on a bill that would put some limits on, in terms of the lookback in terms of criminal landlords who would be looking to hire or looking to possibly rent to people who have been in prison and have criminal convictions. The bill would allow the Commissioner of Housing to establish some limit about how far back a landlord could look at or consider a prior criminal conviction in terms of considering someone for housing.

One of the main problems we've always had, I'd like to hear what your experience in Utah is about trying to find appropriate housing for people when they come out. That's one of the, many studies have shown that peoples' whose housing situation is unstable when they come out of prison are likely to have one of the highest rates of recidivism. That instability contributes to other kinds of instability and then it snowballs and just your view on that.
I just wanna mention an experience that I had with a client some years ago who was coming out of prison, was being considered for an early release program, he'd been a model prisoner and his mother and his brother were willing to take him into their home. It was a stable house. The mother owned, the brother was employed full time, but it turned out that years in the past, both the mother and brother had criminal records. Nothing recent, but you know they were now solid citizens in the community, but the regulations then in place would not allow the department to release him to live with his mother and brother and instead, they were going to have to come up with some sort of put him in a halfway house or put him somewhere else and clearly, there was a stable home for him to go to, but because of the records of his mother and brother, it took us a long time to kind of show the flexibility that was just common sense and let him go live with his mother and brother who were, by that time, stable people. Just your experience in dealing with that in Utah and what we should be doing in Connecticut to facilitate stable housing for people when they come out of prison.

ROLLIN COOK: We ran into this very same problem in Utah and when you describe what that legislation is, that's exactly what's needed. I was here a whole week and I was already on a panel discussing homelessness. One of the things that my leadership team has already pointed out to me is that there is likely even a group of people that we have currently incarcerated and we're not able to find them housing. That is the very thing that we need and if there's something that's going on, for example, in
regard to our rules in regard to supervision, those would obviously have to be updated as well, but I can't emphasize enough, since you're giving me this opportunity. Housing is what it's all about so you can give someone work, you can give someone education, but if you don't have housing for them, Senator, they, none of those things work out. They can't, if they don't have any place to go after they get done working, if they don't have a place to study, if they don't have a place to go back home to, they're going to fail.

So that is the foundational piece and again, it doesn't surprise me that Connecticut's ahead of, ahead of the nation in that particular area. We were having the same challenges. It was called the Good Landlord Program in Utah and there were many people that would stand in defiance saying not in my backyard, you're not going to allow that. Again, back to the question Representative Phipps asked me about restorative justice and it's about what is the right thing to do. You talk about how long are you going to hold these people, I don't know if the word's accountable, I don't like that for the crimes that they pay. They've already done their time. They've done the things they need to. Sooner or later, you've got to be able to say, if we want this person to be a success, then we've got to provide them opportunities that will allow them to do that.

Again, it goes back to what I said as well, uh, many of us grow up with the opportunities to be able to have those kind of things I mean and other people don't. And if we're gonna hold that criminal record against them forever, then they're never gonna see
that there's any hope so I don't have any answer. Again, coming from Utah, because in Utah, we were fighting the same thing.

SENATOR LOONEY (11TH): Thank you. I appreciate your concern and your recognition of the seriousness of the problem. One other thing I just wanted to ask about too is another factor that's shown to decrease recidivism is when inmates are able to keep in regular contact with family members and keep the relationships going during the time that they're away and not become alienated. They're often, they do much better when they come out of prison than those who have not been able to maintain that. One of the problems, of course, is that the prisons are generally located in fairly remote areas and even though Connecticut is certainly a small state and area compared to Utah, we do have that geographical problem that the prisons are located where they are often up in the corners of the state and the population centers from which most of the prisoners come are New Haven, Hartford, Bridgeport, New Britain, and is in many cases a hardship for the families to keep in regular contact.

And in fact, one of the concerns is for instance in that there's not really good mass transit going out to where the prisons are located from the cities. In the city of New Haven, for instance, there was some census tracks in the Newhallville area of New Haven where 45 percent of the households do not own a car and they are entirely dependent upon mass transit so that's a problem. There was a problem we had years ago when the correction system was looking for additional services of money and were putting a
sur charge on every call that inmates made or calls that were made to them, reversing the charges. So again, at least in many cases, poor families were having to pick up these very expensive calls for phone contact with family members who were incarcerated and that also over a period of time became a discouragement maintaining the regular contact just because it was so expensive. I think we've addressed that to some extent, but your experience dealing with that issue, about trying facilitate ongoing contact so that people are not left in an alienated situation without community supports when they finally come out.

ROLLIN COOK: Sure. So the first thing I'd say is just a minute ago we were talking about, we're in this constant conflict about where we're gonna have open facilities and where we wanna close them down and that's always gonna be a challenge. Some of the experiences that I've had is starting to use the technology that's there for us. There's things, it's called video visiting, and although I know many people, so they'd say are you expecting these folks to be able to have, you know, computers or laptops? No. Oftentimes you can set up locations, remote locations in areas where people can go and access the computer. Sometimes it's just at a library, but other places where they could actually have video visiting inside a facility so that way, they don't have to travel as far. That's typically one of the things you do.

The other thing is that you, sometimes it's not necessarily just the opportunity to visit, but what is the quality of visit. So some of the things that
we did in Utah and maybe this is going on in Connecticut as well, I don't know, but we had days where we had family day where families were allowed to come into the facility, bring their children, interact with their mom. We also had the same thing for fathers. Basically, we had like a daddy daughter dance and stuff for them to be able to come in and just spend some quality time and do some things instead of simply across or through a window or across a table, so those are some options, but again, it is a challenge every time.

Those are the types of considerations where we're trying to figure out what facilities do we close. I think the thing that needs to happen is that our administration needs to be open to other ideas if there's other ideas that people have, but those are the couple of things that come to mind for me. The reason I also bring up video visiting, you know one of the things I'm sure the day will come when someone gets processed into a correctional facility when they get handed their new, their clothes and different things like that. In fact, it goes back to restorative justice. Many of the facilities around the world don't, they let them wear their regular clothes, but anyway, they'll be given a tablet when they get there because on those tablets now, you can do everything. It's what we have in our world here on the outside of the facilities, whether it's school, whether it's commissary, whether it's visiting.

All those different things are right there on that tablet. In fact, I know some of them are using them where the person can actually visit basically
anytime the family member wants to contact them. So there's a variety of things that we can look at and hopefully we'll have those opportunities.

SENATOR LOONEY (11TH): Thank you, Commissioner. I appreciate your sensitivity to that problem because I think we all need to focus on what we can do to facilitate the kind of reentry that makes it less likely that people will continue to recycle back into the system. There was a criminal justice scholar at one point said we have a lot of people in our society who are serving life prison sentences on the installment plan. They're in for a few years, they're out, pretty soon they're back in again, out, back and if we can find a way to just cut into that cycle and find a way to make people finally be able to avoid recycling contact with the criminal justice system, everyone will be better off.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Senator Looney. If there are no further comments or questions, I'd just like to say my own little bit about this. I worked with Reverend Colon years ago on the prison ministry visiting the inmates. I've worked with organizations that try to resettle the inmates once they're released and make sure they have the support to succeed and not go back to being incarcerated, and I often tell people because society has an attitude toward people who are trapped within the correctional system. There are very few, in my opinion, very few Charlie Manson's, very few evil people, very few Mother Teresa's on the other side. I think the majority of us try to do the best we can. We muddle along and sometimes we make good decisions, sometimes we make bad decisions, but that
doesn’t mean that we give up on these people even if they’ve made a mistake. So it's good to have a reformer like you coming in to do this job. In a way, I'm glad that this whole controversy and the flyer and everything else came out because it gave us an opportunity to clear the air on some of these things and I really appreciate our Senate ranking member, Senate Fasano, for having taken the time to really do a lot of research regarding this and you know, afforded you the opportunity to be able to address some of these issues and my vice-chair, Representative Phipps, who were both members of the black and Puerto Rican caucus and you know, as you can tell, we're interested in the equity issue. And even the Corrections Department as a purchasing agent you know deals with a lot of vendors and we want to make sure that small businesses, small minority businesses get some of that business too. There's many issues we've been dealing with on so many different levels, but we'll be talking to you about those. I'm glad you're reaching out to the caucus and we'll speak to you about that and I think it's been a good hearing, a long hearing, but a good hearing. The way this works for those that may not know is some of these resolutions to confirm are House Resolutions, some are Senate Resolutions and some are Joint Resolutions. In this case, it's a Senate Resolution so I was extremely happy to see so many of our Senators come and participate and ask questions. Some of them have had to leave, but they will be the ones recommending to their colleagues on the floor of the Senate so this Committee really does not confirm. This Committee just says, you know, we interviewed the person, we think the person
is great, and we ask our colleagues on the floor to make the final vote. So thank you very much for being with us and for your honesty in your answers. And there's just one question I need to ask you before I let you go. It's a question we ask of all our nominees. Is there anything in your background that you believe might prove embarrassing either to this Committee, to the Governor or to the State of Connecticut?

ROLLIN COOK:  No, sir.

REP. VARGAS (6TH):  Well then, thank you very much. We'll take a two-minute break and then we'll resume with our next nominee. Thank you.

We're reconvening the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. We're calling the meeting back to order. We have three more Senate Resolutions. The next one is Michelle Seagull of Glastonbury, Connecticut to be Commissioner of Consumer Protection. Commissioner Seagull, before we begin, can you please rise and raise your right hand? Do you promise to tell us the truth and nothing but the truth?

MICHELLE SEAGULL:  I do.

REP. VARGAS (6TH):  Please be seated. And as is customary, we will begin by allowing the Commissioner designee to make a brief presentation.

MICHELLE SEAGULL:  Well good morning, Representative Vargas, Representative Perillo and members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. First, thank you for allowing me to be here today. As you said, I'm Michelle Seagull and I'm really
honored to be appointed by Governor Lamont to the Commissioner for Consumer Protection.

So I've been with the agency now for almost eight years and have really, first as Deputy and then most recently as Commissioner, and it's really probably personally and professionally one of the greatest honors to be able to work with the amazing people we have at DCP.

I provided in my written testimony some of the accomplishments I'm really proud of there between taking on new responsibilities, streamlining our processes. We've launched a number of programs to address the opioid epidemic. We've grown our outreach in education initiative so the details of some of that are in there. I know this has been a long day so I will let you read that and I'm happy to answer any questions so thank you again.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you for those remarks and I want to congratulate you on your appointment. It's a great agency.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): You and I have had the chance to speak and as I said when we met, that was an agency led for a long time by a fellow Hartford resident, Mary Heslin from the West End and it's an agency that fights for the consumer, for the little guy and I think we all like to think of ourselves as being here for the little guy so we love the underdog and it seems like the consumer many times gets the short of the end stick. So at this point, I'll open up the hearing for questions from Committee members if
there's any Committee member? Yes, our ranking member, Representative Perillo has the floor.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon and congratulations.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Thank you.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Just a couple of quick questions. The regulation of narcotics here in the State of Connecticut all runs through DCP, correct?

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Yes.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): What have you found the obstacles to be in that when you talk about the opioid crisis and you know wasting and things of that sort? It's a very generic question, but if you could address it, that would be helpful.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: The obstacles of just regulating substances?

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Exactly, exactly.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Well it certainly, just, you always the appropriate balance. So you wanna be able to, I mean there are legitimate needs for opioids or for other fairly strong medications, but at the same time, they can be addictive and definitely the opioid epidemic has really revealed the problem when there's either overprescribing or when people become addicted and maybe through other means are getting these things through doctor shopping or on the street. So the biggest challenge is making sure we're appropriately regulating it, regulating this industry so that patients in legitimate need are getting the medications they
want and we haven’t pushed it so far that physicians or prescribers are under-prescribing, but at the same time, we want to avoid over-prescribing and we are starting to see some changes. We've initiated a lot of things at DCP but certainly other agencies, other organizations throughout the state and the legislature itself through bills it's passed. We've done a lot. We actually are seeing opioid prescriptions are going down now.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you. Uh, just a second question, I don't have a lot.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: That's fine.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Um, one of the things I hear from small businesses and trades in particular is the, what they feel to be the overregulation and over-licensure of a lot of professions and, you know, I understand there's a need to balance the needs of the consumer, but at the same time, we don’t wanna create artificial and in some cases expensive barriers to individuals who want to start their own small business. What are your thoughts on how we balance those two interests?

MICHELLE SEAGULL: So I agree you need to have the appropriate equilibrium there. For the most part, when you hear concerns about overregulation at government, it's often not the licenses that we do. For the most part, businesses and industries that are licensed by us actually feel those licenses are important and I think to the extent you were to get rid of those trades or occupational licenses, those industries themselves would be concerned about it. But there certainly could be ones that have gone too
far. You know, we for the most part don’t propose new license or credential types. We are administering the ones that the legislature due to either industry or constituent concerns have felt were appropriate and we're always happy to talk with people about where we may see public health and safety not being impacted if some of that was pulled back on.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Are there any licenses within the agency, this is a tough question and you're probably gonna punt, but that's okay. [Laughter].

MICHELLE SEAGULL: I absolutely will. [Laughter].

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Are there any licenses within the agency that you perhaps feel aren’t necessary?

MICHELLE SEAGULL: So, I mean ultimately, any proposals we have on that we would, you know as an Executive Branch agency wanna consult with others on, um, you know so I'll talk for example, last year. We did propose and successfully eliminated licensing and a board for short hand reporters and for I think it was above-ground pool maintainers. Is that right? So those were ones we found this just really isn’t necessary and really, you know, for short hand reporters, for example, it was that industry itself that expressed the most concerns with eliminating it so we always kind of keep an eye out and when we think there is an opportunity to cut back on things, we make those proposals.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): You know what, it's funny. When you already have the license, it's kind of nice to have it because it helps keep others out who don’t want to have to go through the licensing
process or for whom it becomes a barrier. It would be helpful, at least from my perspective and I think you know from any legislators' perspective, if the agency could even be more aggressive and identify. I mean you listed two licenses right there that I guess most Connecticut residences would be shocked to hear ever existed. It would be helpful as we try to create an environment that's friendly towards entrepreneurs. I think it would be beneficial for the legislature to hear more of that from you in terms of what licenses aren't really required, areas where there are really no complaints, we have had no issues of fraud or consumers being harmed in any way, shape or form. So I would just encourage you and your staff to continue sharing those with us and being a little bit more, I'll just use the word again, aggressive in determining what some might be so you can make good recommendations to us.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Okay. Fair point.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Perillo. Any further questions? Yes, Representative Yaccarino, you have the floor.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Very quickly, in the vein of our good ranking member as far as the opioid crisis and consumer protection, many times, I don't know if you can answer this question or not, but folks sell non-prescription drugs or prescription drugs on the street, but they're controlled substance when technically, it's killing people in many cases so I don't know if there's any role for the Department of Consumer
Protection as far as designating the substance, you know, from controlled substance narcotic or if it's a legal question but it's something that, it makes you wonder because people are taking advantage of prescriptions and people are dying from that. Do you understand what?

MICHELLE SEAGULL: I'm not sure I'm entirely understanding.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): So people take prescriptions out of their grandparents or their parents cabinet and they'll sell them or adults will do that say from their children in a technically controlled substance. It's not a narcotic, but in many cases it's deadly. So is there any role for your agency?

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Um, certainly, I mean that's definitely a problem and I think, you know, we see the opioid epidemic where a lot of people, it wasn’t necessarily that their doctor prescribed it. Their prescription ended so now they were taking out of a medicine cabinet so kind of a few things to say on that. I mean, one, through our initiative to reduce over-prescribing, hopefully they'll just be less of that available to people so if somebody has, you know, maybe a minor surgery where they may not get as many opioids, which means there's gonna be fewer sitting in that medicine cabinet to be diverted or stolen. A second thing we've really been pushing is drug disposal.

So we have great partnerships with police stations, I believe over 90 now throughout the state, drop box, it's in the police station so it's a really secure location available 24/7 and that's a location
we kind of regularly remind and encourage people, clean out your medicine cabinet. Get rid of the stuff you don’t need so somebody, you know a friend, a family member doesn’t take it and use it and dispose of that. So over 30,000 pounds of unneeded medications were disposed of last year in these drop boxes, so that's been a huge success. So that's, there's a number of things we can try to do to either reduce the number of controlled substances that aren’t needed that are out there and then to start getting rid of ones that are out there, that people no longer need.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Yeah our town in North Haven, the fire and police deal with it and according to the town and the public, I think it's very successful, but the concern always is people sell, they get caught, they almost get a slap on the wrist because it's a controlled substance, it's not a narcotic.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: That's more of a law enforcement issue, yeah we don’t have those sorts of police powers.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): That's something we have to look at up here, but.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Okay, yeah.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you and I wish you all the best and thank you, Mr. Chair.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Yaccarino. The Chair recognizes Representative Davis.
REP. DAVIS (57TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Commissioner for being here. Congratulations on your reappointment. I would say that, you know, it may not be thought about very often but our constituents certainly rely on and interact with DCP quite regularly and they may not even realize it just by the way that you regulate many things here in the State of Connecticut and I'm thankful that we have a very good DCP as far as I'm concerned in many respects, and I think a lot of our constituents rely on it for that protection, true protection as a consumer across the state. And many times, our businesses, though you do hear some complaints, it's not something that is quite as regular as one might think and that's certainly a testament to the way that the department operates as well so I thank you for that.

I did see, and I guess in a sense this is a little bit of a job interview, you certainly had a stellar private sector career before joining the Department of Consumer Protection. You graduated from Harvard Law School, looks like you went on to become a partner right before you became a Deputy Commissioner and I'm just curious as to what drew you into public service and kind of going and becoming a Deputy Commissioner here for the State of Connecticut and leaving the private sector that it seemed like you had a growing career in.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: A number of things. I was really excited about the opportunity to be able to have my career kind of dedicated to public service. The Commissioner at the time who brought me on as Deputy was somebody I had worked closely with and really
admired and I thought had a lot of really good ideas for things that could be done at that agency so the opportunity to work with him and do those things. I've always just enjoyed public policy as well. So certainly, you know, I loved my law firm and the people there were great and I learned a tremendous amount but at some point, you know, um, you know my job was about helping facilitate sort of large scale mergers through an anti-trust review process and I wanted to sort take a break from that and have an opportunity to do something with a more public service orientation.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Yeah, I appreciate that. Obviously we all have that calling to public service as well and it's just interesting to see you did have quite the career before taking this position so I applaud you for your willingness to come and serve in the public sector and serve the public and set aside that career.

One thing that I did see, that you were instrumental in helping set up the medical marijuana program for the State of Connecticut and it's often in the news now that we're looking as a State potentially to go towards recreational marijuana and I would assume that most likely your department would be in charge of regulating that or having a role in regulating that as well. What type of impact do you see that having potentially on the Department of Consumer Protection whether it be staffing or just your ability to ramp perhaps quickly or not so quickly to be able to regulate that?

MICHELLE SEAGULL: We'll definitely need staff to deal with it. So we've been spending a lot of time,
you know, this idea of recreational marijuana both nationally and even, you know, past legislative sessions. This is not going to come to us as a surprise. So we've been spending a lot of time internally just thinking through, looking at the different sorts of proposals that are out there, how are we going to adjust to dealing with those, so we feel comfortable that, you know, when something passes, we'll be ready to move pretty quickly. We have a clear sense depending on how that's structured as to what type of positions we'll need and assuming we get the money and the resources to do that, you know we are prepared to move however quickly is necessary.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Thank you and I know that that has been a challenge in some of these other states that, that ramping up, or the ability to implement some of the regulations kind of slowed things down a little bit. And in your case, and I guess a question similar to what Senate Perillo had about licensing, I know each license kind of has a different fee and just curious as to how those fees are set and is there investigation within your department of perhaps reducing the cost of some of these fees to lower that barrier for individuals to enter into certain fields of the workforce?

MICHELLE SEAGULL: So the fees are set by law so the legislature sets those fees and again, we just implement so we haven't, there's always a fiscal note tied to lowering fees so I think for us to lower fees and then also not put a fiscal note on our bill would be a challenge, but it's certainly something that if the fees got lowered, we would
certainly implement and do that and it's within the hands of the legislature.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Next, we'll hear from our Senate vice-chair and president pro tem, Senator Martin Looney and Representative Joe Verrengia. Senator Looney, you have the floor.

SEN. LOONEY (11TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Good afternoon, Commissioner. Congratulations on your re-nomination.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Thank you.

SEN. LOONEY (11TH): Just a couple of questions. Those of us who represents communities where we have quite a large concentration of college students, often there's a particular problem with problem bars serving under age, not being as vigilant as they should and checking ID's and all of that, and obviously the liquor control enforcement wing of your department has responsibility for that. Is there anything more we needed to do in that or is that, are there any barriers to enforcement that we should be aware of, because we have that problem sometimes and obviously it's kind of predictable, the ones that become college hangouts are often the ones that all of a sudden, I think there was a case recently where it turned out there was maybe 100 college students who were under age were on the premises that the time when the raid occurred and you, they'd all been served.
That's one kind of problem we have and the other is sometimes where a so-called problem bar or problem club may not be involved in selling underage, but seems to be attracting other kinds of criminal activity, whether it becomes a place for drug sales or other kinds of activity or acts of violence occurring in the parking lot and places where the police are frequently called, and I know of a few cases, the police in New Haven have sought to intervene to deny a renewal of license for a few of those bars that have become somewhat notorious as places where police are regularly being called because of one kind of a disturbance or another. Just an overview on how your department views that, how you handle it. Is there anything that could be done differently or, you know, I know you always could use more resources or is that an area that's under-resourced or just your overview on that aspect of your responsibility?

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Okay. So the two issues. First, certainly underage drinking is a problem and it's a big, you know one of our priorities and liquor control is to prevent serving either underage people or people who are already intoxicated so we take that very seriously. You know I sound like a broken record and like everybody else here, certainly with more resources we would be out and doing more of these community checks but we work closely with local police departments. So, for example, the bar you referenced where there was a whole bunch of students there. You know, we got this referral from the local police sort of saying this is a danger to our community and we really pretty quickly summarily suspended that license and that's sort of our
process when there's an immediate risk to public health and safety.

Also, sometimes if there is, for example a shooting or some other really serious event happens at a crime we will take away the license or in many instances the businesses will voluntarily surrender it, work with us and local police, let's put together security plan to deal with that. In terms of sort of proactively taking away someone's license based on generalized problems in the community but not a specific event is a little bit more of a challenge. There are due process rights and so the business itself is entitled to an opportunity to be heard and so for the process for that, there is a remonstrance process and community members can come in and certainly, you know, local law enforcement can certainly weigh in as well where they can petition the liquor commission and that's actually, it's within DCP, but there are two separately appointed liquor commissioners who serve with sort of the third member or my designee is on the liquor commission and there would be a hearing where the community and the business could present their case and that would be an opportunity to then deny somebody the renewal of their license. But, you know, you're shutting down an ongoing business in that instance so it's definitely something where there's some due process and an opportunity to be heard.

SEN. LOONEY (11TH): Well, thank you, thank you very much and again, congratulations on your --

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Thank you.
SEN. LOONEY (11TH): Re-nomination and I'm sure you'll continue to do well at DCP.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Well, thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Senator Looney and now the Chair recognizes Representative Verrengia.

REP. VERRENGIA (20TH): Good afternoon and welcome. I was happy, [clears throat], excuse me, I was happy to hear that you were gonna stay on Governor Lamont's team going forward 'cause you and I have had a number of opportunities to work together, particularly when it comes to gaming issues. Oftentimes, when gaming issues are raised, particularly in this building, people first think of the revenue that it may or may not bring in, but I think equally as important, if not more important is the regulatory aspect of gaming as we go forward with a gaming policy. There seems to be two competing models when it comes to the regulatory piece, whether the state would create a new commission if you will outside of DCP or create a gaming model within DCP, so I guess my question is, without getting into a lot of specifics, I'm sure that, as you did with marijuana, you looked at some of the bills that are floating through this building not only this year, but in the past two years and I was wondering if you could just comment on your thoughts as we look at establishing a gaming policy, particularly from a regulatory standpoint?

MICHELLE SEAGULL: So I'd have to see the details of it. Right now, it's sort of an interesting bifurcation already so CLC is overseeing, the integrity of the game piece is regulated by DCP and
that's a lot of licensing, you know lottery agents, etc. Sort of the personnel and other type decisions that are being made by CLC that there's a board of directors that's a number of political appointees from, you know various members of the legislature and the governor's office who oversee that so I don't know that adding a third sort of oversight would, I don't know you know how administratively that would work. You know we're happy to have a longer conversation on that, you know and there's just other, you know unique challenges that come both with that bifurcation and where you're regulating what is now a quasi-public entity whose revenues go into the general fund, so there's some unique challenges. It's probably a longer conversation.

REP. VERRENGIA (20TH): And I appreciate that response. I wasn’t thinking just of specifically the lottery, but as the state expands their gaming policies, whether it's within commercial casinos or sports betting, from a regulatory standpoint, if you think it would be best that DCP be the regulatory agency to handle those?

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Well right now we have the expertise you know and so we are certainly prepared to continue doing that.

REP. VERRENGIA (20TH): And having said that, I would imagine that just by virtue of all the extra work that you would need additional staff and additional people to go ahead and implement that.
MICHELLE SEAGULL: Certainly, yeah. If there's a third casino, if there's forced betting, that would require more resources.

REP. VERRENGIA (20TH): All right, thanks and I look forward to continuing to work with you. Congratulations.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Well, thank you and likewise.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Verrengia. We have another [laughs], yes, well, the Chair recognizes the illustrious Representative from the great town of Hampton, Representative D'Agostino.

REP. D'AGOSTINO (91ST): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome Commissioner. I first just wanted to also put on the record how much I've enjoyed working with you and your staff as House Chair of General Law. I hope people appreciate that you're probably the smartest antitrust lawyer that the administration's got and with that background, it's much appreciated with a lot of the issues that we deal with. Between you and the governor's new counsel, we're in good shape in terms of the legal firepower that you both bring and your staff as well.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Thank you.

REP. D'AGOSTINO (91ST): And again, I've really appreciated that. I've appreciated also the perspective that gives you in terms of competition and particularly with respect to our liquor laws. I think you and I have both been on the same page occasionally with respect to how we need to do that. We're not raising minimal bottle this year, but
we're waiting on I think most people know, we're waiting on the second circuit to decide a case that may impact our minimum bottle laws and I'm hoping that you and your staff in conjunction with Counsel Clark and think about if that case does vitiate our minimal bottle laws, how we react to that. We're gonna be looking to you so I just, I know you’ve got a lot on your plate, but I wanna make sure that you're, that that's in the back of your mind, that we need to react to that if that happens.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Yeah.

REP. D'AGOSTINO (91ST): As you know, we've got marijuana legalization on the agenda this year. We want your input on that as well and also the building trades we've talked about as well so you’ve got, you do a lot and I just want to reflect that I appreciate that and again, not just the time and effort that your staff puts into that, but also the legal action that you’ve brought to bear on those issues that I find very persuasive and the committee has as well so thank you. Thank you for that.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Well, thank you. Appreciate it.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative D'Agostino. The uh, well I'd like to add that having served as Deputy Commissioner in the agency and having served as Commissioner in the previous administration, the fact that you are being asked to serve again by the new administration of Governor Lamont speaks volumes. It shows that there's confidence in the work that you’ve been doing and every belief on the part of myself and I believe I speak on behalf of all the Committee members that
you will continue to do so. We congratulate you again on your reappointment by Governor Lamont, and there's one question that I ask of all nominees before I let them go, and that is there anything you believe in your past that you believe might prove embarrassing to this committee, to the Governor or to the State of Connecticut?

MICHELLE SEAGULL: No.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well, thank you very much. That concludes this portion of the public hearing. We'll take a one-minute stretch and we'll be right back.

MICHELLE SEAGULL: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): [Gavel]. Okay, we're calling the Committee back to order. And we have our next nominee, Commissioner Elizabeth Bye of West Hartford to be confirmed as the Commissioner of Department of Early Childhood, and before we ask her to speak, I'll ask her to rise. Do you promise to tell us the truth and nothing but the truth?

ELIZABETH BYE: I do.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): All right and as is usual, the first order of business is an introductory statement by the nominee so you have the floor.

ELIZABETH BYE: Thank you. Good afternoon, Representative Vargas, Representative Phipps, Representative Yaccarino, Representative Davis, Representative Perillo, Representative D'Agostino and Representative Verrengia. There weren’t too many of you so I thought I could recognize all of you. My name is Beth Bye for the record and I've been asked by Governor Lamont to lead the Office of
Early Childhood for the State of Connecticut. I'm grateful to Governor Lamont for his commitment to high quality early childhood services in Connecticut and for this nomination.

I think my education and background have really prepared me for this job. You all know me as a legislator, but I have a long career in early childhood. I began working at an infant toddler center when I was in college and that was an incredibly rewarding experience. That's what got me hooked and from there, I served on the board as a senior and for the first time saw the challenge that childcare centers face trying to balance affordability for parents, fair pay for staff, and high quality care for children. As I began my first day as Commissioner of Early Childhood almost 40 years later, I can tell you that those same issues remain.

After college, I worked in several different kinds of early childhood settings. I worked at Boston Children's Hospital on a national study that followed up on premature infants with their development program and I also worked in graduate school on a large national childcare study looking at the impact of childcare regulations, which was perfect for me because it brought together my love of public policy and my love of research in child development.

When I came back to Connecticut, I worked in a number of childcare settings. I worked in Darien at the YW, I worked in Greenwich at Children's Day School, and I was director, bringing me to Hartford, of Trinity College Community Child Center in Frog
Hollow. I went on to become Director of Early Childhood for CREC and developed some public preschool programs at Wintonbury Early Childhood Magnet and the School for Young Children at Asylum Hill and also in my private sector work, one of the things I'm proudest of was being hired to start the University of St. Joseph Lab School, which is a school for young children. We renovated an old school and that was named the model preschool for the State.

I learned firsthand through those experiences that early childhood needed to be systemized, that was over, it was in five different agencies and we needed an office of early childhood that was just focused on those specific needs of young children. Connecticut is now considered a national model with more states joining, creating offices of early childhood that are focused on young children. This is really important for Connecticut's young children and family, but also for our economy. Just last week, a report came out from over 200 business leaders, it's called Ready Nation, and their verdict is that the lack of high quality childcare is costing $57 billion dollars a year in lost earnings, productivity and revenue. We also know, you know the research about early childhood and the impact is ubiquitous. In this legislature, some of you today have voted on many bills to enhance early childhood, but James Heckman at the University of Chicago, an economist, Nobel prize winner, has said that this is one of the best public investments you can make. There's a 13 percent return on investment for comprehensive, high quality early childhood.
The office also does home visiting and those programs as well. Going in very early when a mother has a child and teaching them about child development and all the wonderful things a young child can do has a great return on investment.

So the OEC in Connecticut, I believe, is important to children, families, employers for the state budget and for our economy. We work with community providers and state agencies who identify children at risk and send out home visitors. We license and inspect early childhood centers to make sure they're safe for children, and we also do summer camps and afterschool programs. We manage the Care for Kids Program and we combine a number of programs to support high quality preschool in communities where many families can't afford high quality preschool. We also support quality improvement and over the past few years, we're working in this legislature in the office to have a two-generation approach to early childhood and supporting families.

I figured out that over my career, I've worked with more than 1900 children as a childcare teacher or director, and about 35 percent of those children have been from families that faced economic challenges that come with living in poverty. One thing I can tell you from working in Mission Hill in Boston, Frog Hollow in Hartford, to Greenwich in Connecticut is that every family cares about their young children and what communities see in the birth of a young child or in a young child in their community is opportunity, but so often parents face challenges, economic, emotional or just a basic lack of knowledge about how to best support optimal child
development. And parents in all communities face these challenges and still wanna do their best.

I know I myself, even with my Master's in Child Development, I was a Birth to 3 parent, and those Birth to 3 parents changed the trajectory of my child's future. And I've also worked with families who needed Birth to 3, you'd find out later, but hadn't had those services. The proper outreach hadn't been done and that child did not have the opportunities perhaps that my child did because she received Birth to 3 Services.

The charge of OEC is so critical for Connecticut and for our families. Our job is to help realize the opportunity that comes with the birth of each baby and to partner with other agencies to lead to optimal child development. So we can only do this work working together with other state agencies, with hospitals, with non-profits, with philanthropy, with childcare programs, family resource centers, and so much more. We have to invest in quality services. It's not just any early childhood that matters, it's the quality that matters and Connecticut, thanks to the 1997 School Readiness Legislation does lead the country in accredited early childhood centers so we do have many quality programs, but we still face the challenge that early childhood professionals are the lowest paid workers in our state despite increased education requirements that we've put on them as an office, and at the same time with the economy getting better, but they have other opportunities for employment. So that is a challenge and I know this legislature has a couple of bills that are gonna be
before you related to compensation of early childhood educators.

So to close, over my career, I've used research, hard work, and an understanding of best practices to drive improvements of programs that I've developed and led. This disposition has helped me to establish some of the most respected early childhood programs in Connecticut. My overriding goal as Commissioner is to have our agency do that. To have one of the most respected agencies in the state and the country. I believe we can do this in Connecticut and lead to better outcomes for our children. I look forward to the session ahead and working with Governor Lamont and all of you, if approved, to support our shared goal of supporting children and families in Connecticut. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you very much, Commissioner. First of all, I want to congratulate you on your appointment. I was a member of the Committee on Children's Issues which was led at the time, my first two terms led by Dan Ervin in the House and by Dante Bartolomeo in the Senate and we were very excited about the creation of the Early childhood office and I think this department is going to do great things for Connecticut children, and I can think of no better person to lead that agency than you. At this point, I'll open it up for members of the Committee. Yes, our ranking member, Representative Perillo, you have the floor.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): I actually don’t have any questions. I just wanted to say congratulations.
ELIZABETH BYE: Oh, thank you, Representative.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Yes, Representative Yaccarino?

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Same thing. I've known you for nine years working together through higher ed and your commitment to early childhood education. It was great catching up yesterday and I wish you all the best and I think you'll do a great job.

ELIZABETH BYE: Thank you. I enjoyed our conversation.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Yaccarino. Representative Godfrey?

REP. GODFREY (110TH): I'd like to associate my remarks with Representatives Perillo and Yaccarino. I'm delighted that you are where you are. Although I think I'm the only one here in the room who's actually here to vote for the 1997 bill [laughs].

ELIZABETH BYE: That was really, that was groundbreaking [crosstalk].

REP. GODFREY (110TH): It was and it took a lot of work and a lot of persuasion. The devil's in the details as so many things around here are. [crosstalk] Tommy Ritter, who was Speaker at the time, really took the lead on it and it was both interesting and satisfying to watch and actually get to the end and finally get this all put together and I've been working with the childcare agencies down my way in Danbury since then, and it's just remarkable what we've been able to do for children
of every type because of that law. But I wanted to talk, you know you practically invented the childhood education program here in the State of Connecticut in the last bunch of years and it's also another thing that is working, and I know you will advance its mission because you pretty much wrote the mission statement and you know more than anyone else about it in the State of Connecticut. And you know, you know how we elected, we worry about the education gap and early childhood learning that the children really need to pick up a big chunk of their skills before the third grade. Nothing new that I'm telling you, but it's just, I'm really, really happy for you and I'm really happy for my constituents in the State of Connecticut that you are where you are. And I have to say all that now because you're a Senate Resolution and I can't say it on the floor.

ELIZABETH BYE: Oh, thank you.

REP. GODFREY (110TH): I can only say it here. Thank you for that.

ELIZABETH BYE: Thank you, Representative.

REP. GODFREY (110TH): Good to see you.

ELIZABETH BYE: And you and Danbury have some incredible early childhood professionals who've been part of designing the program that's working.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Yes, Senator Bergstein, you have the floor.

SEN. BERGSTEIN (36TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I just wanna echo my colleagues' sentiments. I think we are all so proud and pleased and honored to have you at the helm of this agency, and I just wanna say
as someone who's also spent my career advocating for investing in early childhood so that we can prevent costly, unnecessary and preventable outcomes later on in life that it's not just the right thing to do to give kids the best start in life so they can reach their potential, it's also the best economic policy.

ELIZABETH BYE: Absolutely.

SEN. BERGSTEIN (36TH): So, thank you for leading that and on a personal note, I just wanna also thank you for being a great mentor to me and to the other women in the Senate and even though you're not in the caucus room anymore, you're present is still felt always and we really look forward to working with you and having you guide us forward. Thank you.

ELIZABETH BYE: Thank you so much, Senator.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Senator Bergstein. Representative, uh Senator Moore, you have the floor.

SEN. MOORE (22ND): Thank you. Congratulations.

ELIZABETH BYE: Thank you, Senator.

SEN. MOORE (22ND): I've been honored to be in your presence for four years. I appreciate everything you've done to mentor women and be honest and forthright and thoughtful in the work that you do. I believe that you're here for such a time as this and this is the right time, that you have the right skills and the right heart to do this job. I recently visited with you in Bridgeport, ABCD, which is a large agency that serves children and you were
just so bright and cheery and all these great ideas you had and wanting to embrace the community and have them a part of it and a can-do attitude. I believe you bring everything that we need to support our children at this time. I do want to say we are going to miss you greatly in the Senate. You have been a great support for everyone in the Senate and you're always thoughtful, but also kind in how you address different issues, even when they're difficult so I wish you all the best and I'm really grateful that at this time, I'm here to be here to be able to support you in this and be able to vote for you on the floor of the Senate. It's an honor. Thank you.

ELIZABETH BYE: Thank you so much, Senator.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Senator Moore. Yes, my vice-chair, Representative Phipps.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Congratulations [crosstalk].

ELIZABETH BYE: Thank you, Representative.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): It's been a pleasure working with you for four years on the other side when I was parent advocate. I think your work and your resume speaks for itself, but if you would --

ELIZABETH BYE: Please. [laughs]

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Just humor the first year legislator for being the only jerk that's probably going to ask questions. [laughs]

ELIZABETH BYE: I welcome them, Representative.

UNKNOWN SPEAKER: So we're all jerks.
REP. PHIPPS (100TH): No, no, I'm gonna be the jerk that asks the questions [laughter] so I appreciate you humoring me. I agree with Senator Bergstein that shared that starting off with a great education is going to be one of the best ways to make sure that we work on the achievement gap and the success gap and the opportunity gap. What would you say is the number one underlying reason or top two reasons that we have the opportunity gap that we have?

ELIZABETH BYE: Wow, that's a big question. I think there are many reasons. My experience, working in early childhood in a number of different communities, is that we need a broad approach to poverty, that poverty keeps knocking. Some gains have been made by this legislature and the previous governor around housing are going to be incredibly helpful to parents. Children need warm, responsive care and they need structure and routine and poverty has parents going to work at hours that are unpredictable sometimes, poverty has families moving often. Poverty interrupts structure and routine for children.

I do know that every parent wants what's best for their children, but you know when you look at Connecticut, if you're a parent that wants to enter the work force, childcare and transportation get in your way and so we need to think of ways to make investments that help people enter the workforce. In Connecticut, we are short 51,000 infant/toddler spaces for parents who are working. What happens in that situation is either parents can't get to work regularly, they don't keep their jobs, or parents are putting children in places they're not entirely
comfortable with, but they have to feed their children and house their children.

I just had a person, a provider who works with me at the office tell the story of a parent who left their child at a childcare center that they knew was not safe and they knew was not good for their child's development, but they had to have a place for that child to live and to feed that child. These are the kind of choices that parents are making and many of those situations have been avoided because of School Readiness in Connecticut, again one of the leaders in the country in preschool access for 3 and 4-year-old's, not just 4-year-old's, but before 3, that's when the brain is most vulnerable and I think Connecticut needs to take a serious look at the fact that we lost six babies in unlicensed family childcare over the past 18 months and so our office has worked with the Office of the Child Advocate on a public relations campaign to tell parents to trust licensed care.

Our licensors are out there licensing family childcare, encouraging folks to go into family childcare. Also, we need to look at ways to make the rates for center-based infant childcare competitive so that they can open up some infant/toddler spaces so when I look at the work we have to do at the Office of Early Childhood, it's first and foremost protecting children's health and safety and so they're literally life and death choices going on and parents who love their child so much and that feeling of your child and knowing that you're leaving them in a place that's not safe. What could be worse?
And so we need to create safe spaces for our infants and toddlers. I think that will help with poverty and we need to I think also think about when parents are in training or in education, that we help them with childcare. You know, for example, our community colleges all have lab schools that are underutilized, just centers sitting in the community colleges there that could help if there was some way, so I think we're looking for ways to make more quality care accessible earlier, but I think the opportunity gap is about all those things that come with poverty that lead to instability or trauma for children in some cases, we need to look at as a state.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Thank you for that. I would also hope that we continue to look at the intersection, specifically around race and how race plays right into the part of housing, poverty, trauma, so and so forth. I really do think if we started to better name the race issue that we have in our country and in our community and in our state at the local level, I think we would be a lot better at being able to address the, I would say the symptoms which are the poverty, the housing and so on and so forth.

ELIZABETH BYE: And to that end, we have some data at the office that shows that African Americans and Latinos in Connecticut do not have the same access to quality early childhood education services as white families do, just simply put, and so we need to address that issue.
REP. PHIPPS (100TH): And would your office be strong advocates for universal pre-K 3 and pre-K 4 from a public school standpoint?

ELIZABETH BYE: Well, I think in Connecticut we have a mixed delivery system. We're not in a position to have public 3 and 4-year-old preschool right now. I think, you know working with Governor Lamont, public schools are part of the solution. Currently, more than 7000 preschoolers are being served in public preschools, but then we also have about the same or a little more being served in School Readiness and private programs so I think however we can reach the most kids with the best possible care in a way that's affordable is how we're gonna get there so that's, the way we do it in Connecticut is each community has a School Readiness Council and that's a local decision so in my community, the town and the School Readiness Council have put a lot of their investment into public schools. In other communities, other communities have braided and it's some public and some private, in our community it is too, but it's just leaning toward the public.

So the way the School Readiness legislation was written, it gives a lot of control to the local community who make the decision so if the schools want the funds and work with the School Readiness Council and say we can do it, that's how that happens.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): And then a last little, technical, not a technical question, but probably more technical than the general questions I asked before. So this is around fingerprinting and the federal changes. What could your office do to help
overcome some of those challenge and obstacles around fingerprinting of our --

ELIZABETH BYE: I'm so glad you asked that question, Representative Phipps, because it gives me a chance to say in front of the legislators, this is a huge problem. We need to work, our chief attorney just to work at the State Police and I'm so glad cause she understands the challenges that we face.

There are new federal rules coming into effect that by October, you have to have fingerprints before you start working with children in programs that get federal funding which a great deal of our programs that we oversee, particularly in some of our low-income communities have federal funding, and now, you can get your fingerprints and go to work. The rule is in October, you have to have the fingerprints processed before you start work and Connecticut is taking now 2-4 months to process fingerprints and it's costing $85 dollars per fingerprint and when you talk about communities of color who often rely on family childcare, the law is that every member of that household to have a fingerprint. So you could be looking at getting $4 dollars an hour to do childcare, and needing to have five people fingerprinted at $85 dollars a head before you can even start providing childcare.

So other states have figured out ways to have them come back within 24 or 48 hours and have been able to reduce the price with new technologies, this is already, Governor Lamont's office already knows about this challenge and I think one of the exciting things about his administration is how he's excited for us to work across agencies. So I'm sure, you
know this matters to businesses, to nonprofits, to bussing companies, there's so many parts of our economy impacted by this issue that we will be focused on it, but I think it is something that the legislature should understand is a big issue. I looking at Representative Verrengia too.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Thank you for that. That's a huge issue I know it affected my school.

ELIZABETH BYE: Yes. How are you gonna have a camp if it takes two months to come back. You hire in May, it's already September you know so.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): Exactly.

ELIZABETH BYE: So we will resolve it. I'm convinced we will resolve it but it will probably take the legislature, the Governor's office and two or three agencies to get this done.

REP. PHIPPS (100TH): So, the last thing I wanna share is that I know the parents of a small community school in Stamford who are really excited about your nomination. I know there are many in this building that now I call colleagues that I said when I was a parent advocate, our parents didn’t always feel heard; however, you are someone that often took the time, not often took the time, every time, took the time to make sure that their voice could be heard. As I said our parents are, at the time I said were and still are in many ways some of our least affluent in the entire state and now there's scholars are some of the most highest-performing students in the State of Connecticut. But the more important part was the ability to be heard and to know that their voice matters and to
know that they can come into this building and no matter how little or how much they made or how far that trip was to get from Stamford to Hartford, that they would be heard. You were indicative of that spirit from the very beginning so I appreciate that and they also wanted me to make sure that I said congratulations to you and that they look forward to continuing to work with you in your new role.

ELIZABETH BYE: I'll come down and see them.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you very much, Representative Phipps. Any other members of the Committee wishing to make a statement or ask a question? If not, I want to congratulate you again for your appointment to this key position and this is quite a love fest [laughter]. I wish all our nominees --

ELIZABETH BYE: Geez my bills would’ve passed if I could’ve done this when I was up here. [Laughter].

REP. VARGAS (6TH): If we would have hearings like this, we'd be able to finish our business in no time so, but anyway it's, you’ve earned the kind of respect that you commanded here today at the hearing and everybody knows the work you’ve done and we're confident of the work you will do so, there’s one question that I ask of all nominees, and that is there anything in your past that you believe might prove embarrassing either to this committee, to the Governor or to the State of Connecticut?

ELIZABETH BYE: No, Representative.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well congratulations.

ELIZABETH BYE: Thank you.
REP. VARGAS (6TH): And that's it for this portion and we have, we're down to the last, but not least nominee and Victoria L. Veltri, before you take a seat, please raise your right hand. Do you promise to tell us the truth and nothing but the truth?

VICTORIA VELTRI: I do.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): You may take a seat. Victoria Veltri of Colchester, Connecticut has been nominated by Governor Lamont to be the Executive Director of the Office of Health Strategy, and as is customary, we'll allow her a few minutes to make her initial presentation. The floor is yours.

VICTORIA VELTRI: Thank you very much. Good day, Representative Vargas, Representative Phipps, members of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee. I'm Victoria Veltri and it's of course an honor and privilege to be nominated by Governor Ned Lamont to continue in my role as the executive director of the Office of Health Strategy.

Healthcare is among the most critical systems impacting residents, our communities, our economy, so I really thank this committee for the opportunity to discuss how the Office of Health Strategy, OHS, can best serve the people of Connecticut afford high-quality, affordable and accessible healthcare and equitable healthcare for all of our residents.

In a strong bipartisan effort, the General Assembly fully established the Office of Health Strategy in March 2018 to better use existing state resources and advance the health forms that will drive down healthcare costs, address Connecticut's racial,
economic and gender health disparities, and undertake technology-driven modernization efforts.

By way of background, my interest in healthcare began in my family. My mom was a school nurse, my dad was an engineer at UTC and also served two terms as a Republican State Representative from East Hartford, and my brothers are both medicine. All of this really makes me an outlier as a lawyer, but I actually began my career as a chemist and that actually led me to public interest work and I'm honored to have served in state government for the past 13 years, spending 10 years at the Office of the Healthcare Advocate, and then serving Lieutenant Governor Nancy Wyman as her chief health policy advisor before moving to the Office of Health Strategy and I am still a member of the board of the Access Health Connecticut, our insurance exchange.

I said this last February when I was before you, but it's still true today. The most important skills that I bring to OHS are listening to and collaborating with stakeholders because healthcare is really about people. As the current ED of OHS, I've worked with many of you and your colleagues and our colleagues, our federal delegation and hundreds of partners throughout the state to find solutions to healthcare's most intractable problems. If I'm fortunate enough to be confirmed, that's how I will continue to work. My written testimony outlines some of our early successes at OHS, but in the interest of time, I'll only speak to a few.

First, I'm pleased to report that we received a $12-million-dollar federal grant to roll out the state's first health information exchange which is expected
this spring. We've developed initiatives to strengthen population health and improve social determinants of health like housing and education aligned with Commissioner Bye. We're closely working with the comptroller to contain prescription drug costs and to develop an affordability standard for healthcare in Connecticut. And finally, we've created a consortium to help Connecticut's large employers and their workers contain healthcare costs and improve value.

Like all states, Connecticut is challenged by how best to ensure the promise of high-quality healthcare. With the support of Governor Lamont and the General Assembly, we can rise to that challenge and we can lead on healthcare. I thank you all for the opportunity to address you today. It's my hope we can continue our productive work together. Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you for the initial statement and I want to congratulate you on your appointment by Governor Lamont.

VICTORIA VELTRI: Thank you.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): And I was wondering if you could share with us a little bit about what the scope of the agency is about and how you see yourself in your role as moving the agency's mission or goals along.

VICTORIA VELTRI: Sure, thank you for that question. I'd be happy to answer that. So our office brings together essentially three strains of work and then has an overarching mission. So our office brought into, well we brought into our office as a result of the public act that created the office, the Former
Office of Healthcare Access which is now called the Health Systems Planning Unit of the Office of Health Strategy. So many of you are familiar with Certificate of Need Process. We have that, hospital financial reporting, group practice reporting. There's tons of data collection that goes on associated with that work so that entire operation is under our office. Also under our office is the coordination of statewide health information technology initiatives, so the health information exchange that is going to be stood up is under our office as well as the All Payer Claims Database and you know healthcare, you have to speak in acronyms so the APCD. That came over to us from the Health Insurance Exchange and that is essentially a large database of claims, healthcare claims from which we can extract lots of information about the cost of healthcare across the state, what's provided where and when.

So health information technology and the last piece is really the care delivery reform work and the kind of payment reform work that is going on in healthcare across the United States and many states around us and that has chiefly been funded through a state innovation model grant that we got from the federal government, a $45-million-dollar grant that we got four years ago, but that work is like the health information technology work, depends on engagement with hospital providers, consumers, the carriers, all of those folks are at the table with us working on that. And then the agency as a whole, we now sort of see our agency as bigger than those three components and we view our work as tying those strands together. We have a very clear eye towards
bringing down healthcare costs and improving outcomes for all the residents of this state and by that, I mean we have, really have a laser-like focus on health equity and the challenges of racial and ethnic disparities in our state and gender and income and LGBT disparities and outcomes in our state. So that's sort of the overarching way we look at the agency, with a laser-like focus on cost and accessibility to healthcare.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you very much for that overview about the agency, and I'll open it up. Our ranking member, Representative Perillo has the floor.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Hello.

VICTORIA VELTRI: Hello. How are you?

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Good afternoon. You just actually mentioned two words I want to talk about. One was accessibility and the other was cost, and if you could just generally give me your thoughts on how you balance the two cause they're not necessarily congruent.

VICTORIA VELTRI: That's true. They may or may not be congruent. It depends on your view of healthcare. Well, I think that healthcare access has historically has been linked with rates, you know reimbursement rates. That is true to a large degree. Reimbursement rates can sometimes dictate peoples' access to healthcare, but there are many, many other things that dictate peoples' access to healthcare that happen outside of the provider's office including poverty, including housing,
including education. Some of the same things that Commissioner Bye just mentioned are very key in controlling healthcare costs or bringing healthcare costs down. That is why we spend a lot of time in our office working on trying to reinvent primary care and reinventing accountability for healthcare to spread it beyond the provider's office to communities.

We think pursuing initiatives like that, we can actually address the high cost of healthcare and bring it down, and that means investment in things like upstream activities, what we call prevention to a degree that we haven’t done before in the State of Connecticut.

So the two lined, accessibility and cost, but accessibility, once again depending on how you sort of define accessibility is not necessarily incongruent with healthcare costs. As we address prevention, we will improve access. We will also bring down healthcare cost. Those two things are clearly linked.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): We hear a lot about merging within the industry, hospitals acquiring other hospitals, hospitals acquiring physician practices. What are the potential benefits and risks of that when it comes to the delivery system and the cost?

VICTORIA VELTRI: So that's a very good question. Over the last probably 10-15 years, that process has accelerated, merges and acquisitions. That's in part because providers have taken on more responsibility for what we call total cost of care and reaching beyond just traditional provision of
healthcare services to addressing those things that I just mentioned, social determinants of health, but also linking inpatient care to outpatient care and things like that. To do that, in lots of cases you need scale, you may need scale. To enter some of these arrangements that the federal government has established like accountable care organizations, you need scale. So you have to have let's say 5000 patients that you're accountable for. That requires a level of scale that oftentimes means mergers, consolidations and practices coming together.

That said, there is very substantial evidence that shows that prices have increased as a result of those mergers and acquisitions and that is where I think we have to get in deep on these things. Our office has been focused on looking at those mergers and acquisitions through a different lens. One is through the actual prices that are charged, you know unit prices of services. The other is through this total cost of care model. Now, if we can say to people, if you'd like to have a mergers or an acquisition, we'd like you to be accountable for the total cost of care. We'd like you to be accountable for the outcomes you deliver. So we would like you to look at your provision of healthcare through a lens of the total amount of money that you are spending and being held to some kind of quality measures about how you're delivering that care. That is sort of the trend in the market, that providers, in exchange for this scale are now being asked to be more accountable on the quality side of the equation in order to ensure that costs do actually eventually come down, or at least the rate of growth of costs comes down.
REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you. It would seem to me that a lot of those trends and decisions are market driven. What is the state's role in that? And, and --

VICTORIA VELTRI: Yeah, oh, I'm sorry, go ahead.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Oh, no, no. Um, and, well I was gonna ask you should the state have a role, but you're the Executive Director of the Agency so you obviously think they do. [Laughter]. But what is the state's role?

VICTORIA VELTRI: Right so the state, well specifically, the state obviously has a role in any kind of individual transaction, where there's a merger request or an acquisition. That has to come through our office right, so there's usually a public hearing and then a record is built and I'm kind of glad you asked that question because now we are asking specifically questions in those applications about the impact on pricing, the impact of cost of that merger, very specific questions. We're asking questions about whether, in these mergers, the parties coming together are going to enter these new payment model arrangements to ensure that they are accountable for the cost of care and accountable for the quality they deliver. We're asking questions about their technology capabilities to make sure they're gonna be able to exchange data across their network and across the state on patients to ensure that costs will come down and improvement happens.

So specifically, with respect to those applications, we are asking many, many, more questions and we have
not yet had an application that has come through OHS where there's been an approval or not with some sorts of conditions attached. There are several applications pending, which I can't really talk in detail about, but I think you'll see the office's philosophy be towards reigning in those costs or at least asking for limitations on those costs through that process. So that's one way.

A secondary way is by leveraging the state's purchasing power. There are several of us who have been talking sort of behind the scenes about how can we harness the state's purchasing power, whether it's through the state employee plan or Medicaid and all the departments that purchase healthcare, by bringing those purchases together to try to drive down prices, whether it's prescription drugs or something else. There are efforts around the country that Connecticut has not yet at least pursued around reference pricing. Some states are pursuing reference pricing so they're tying reimbursement rates to the Medicare fee schedules, etc. So those may or may not happen, but there are tools in the toolbox that the state could use depending on how far the state wants to go. My preference is to start through these processes to see if we can work collaboratively with the providers, which we've been doing over the last year, and they recognize the cost dilemma and have so far come to the table with us and I think that's the preferable way to handle a process like that.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): One of the things we hear quite often actually from the hospitals in the state is that our handling of Medicaid reimbursement has
made it financially difficult for them, and historically, you know the silent cost has always been the cost shift and we're seeing much more that commercial insurers are not willing to accept their increased share of the cost of the hospital because quite frankly, their member groups aren't willing to bear the increase in the premium. So how do you balance the state's need to control its Medicaid costs with the system's need to make sure that premiums are affordable and that access is there?

VICTORIA VELTRI: Right and that's a really good question because I think sometimes, people do not link premiums back to the cost of care and I think that's a really important point to make that people are seeing premiums in their pocketbook expenditures. Out-of-pocket expenses go up and that's partly because of the cost of care. Right, the cost underlying the premium is what drives the premium.

We have looked at, so we get the financial reporting from the hospitals and you will see a variation. There's no question that there's a variation in performance among the hospitals and the hospital systems that mostly goes along with the size. So the larger size hospitals and larger size systems are performing in general better than the little guys, you know the individual hospitals are performing. So that means you almost cannot have a one-size-fits-all solution to that problem. You have to look at each hospital under its own circumstances and see what's driving either a lower financial performance or a better financial performance and what I'm seeing and what I think a
lot of people are seeing in the market is employers who foot the bill for most of the people in the state when it comes to healthcare coverage are driving their employees towards what they think is a lower cost of care that can provide equal quality and if that does happen, you'll see a shift, I think you will see shift in volume towards some of the smaller, maybe some of the smaller hospitals in the state.

I don't think, I will say I don't think the carriers believe, to speak for carriers, but I don't believe that the carriers have the kind of leverage they used to have when it comes to hospital pricing. There's no question there's a tension on this issue and it's going to remain as long as the state has a challenge right? We have a challenge with our budget. But I also believe that the commercial sector shouldn’t have to bear all of the costs of what we're doing on the Medicaid side. So we've got to come to the table and come to an agreement. I think, and I've said this before I think another forum, but everybody's gotta own this issue of healthcare costs. We all have to own it. We have to own our part in it and we all have to get together and come up with a solution. It's going to be hard, but we have to do it. We have to do it.

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Thank you. I was keeping score. I asked you four, you told me all of them were good questions so I appreciate that [laughter] and because of your support, I will give you mine. Thank you.

VICTORIA VELTRI: Oh, thank you. [Laughs].
REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Perillo. Next, we'll hear from Representative Yaccarino.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you for what you’ve done. I've always supported your role.

VICTORIA VELTRI: Thank you.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): A couple of complicated questions in think. I'm not sure if you have the answer, but a couple of weeks ago the whole State of Connecticut did a, I think a CT2019, count the homeless and went out you know to try to get data from homeless on folks and put it on, you know just collected the data and unfortunately, there are quite a few homeless people throughout the state that week. So does your office do anything if you get it, if you, do you know what I'm talking about? If you get the data from like Harkness House, Columbus House, Liberty. Do you receive that?

VICTORIA VELTRI: So that data is slightly different; however, gives me a chance to talk about the partnership that we've developed with the, Partnership for Strong Communities.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Yep.

VICTORIA VELTRI: And I hope with our Department of Housing, we will have a partnership on this. We just haven’t connected yet, but we will. We have a Health and Housing Stability workgroup that meets twice a month, I think it's twice a month now, and we're talking about this very issue so our Health Information Technology officer has responsibility
for health information technology, but we are talking about how to align that data with other data sets to do targeted data, targeted health intervention that are clearly tied to housing, so that's the work that's actually taking place this month. We have our first meeting set up to talk about that data exchange and how we can make that work.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): I did participate. It was an eye-opening experience. I've done stuff in the past, but this was totally different. Seeing people at 3 in the morning just nowhere to go and it always, most came down to, uh, they had nowhere to stay. And fortunately, we were able to connect some folks. So after that, I was trying to work on some things up here and it always goes back to housing and stability, but so you do have a role and that was my question.

VICTORIA VELTRI: I think all our agencies have a role and so people have said before me, it's great to go on the, because of the previous commissioners and we've all been working together already but health is everywhere, this is how I see it. Everything is health and health is everything and you can't be healthy if you don't have stable housing. You can't get a great education if you're not healthy. You know all these things tie together and so the philosophy we bring to this, and I think it was pretty clear from Governor Lamont and our CLO, Paul Mounts, that we wanna work together. We wanna send that message that the agencies gotta work together.
REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Well I had a meeting with Paul Mounds about this today so that's a good thing.

VICTORIA VELTRI: Great.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): So another question then, so when you have the opioid epidemic, and that evening wasn’t just folks on drugs, but there were folks on drugs, do you track that for, obviously they need care either Rushford or somewhere in the state or some hospitals or care, and access to health.

VICTORIA VELTRI: So we have, I think we have several roles there. One is clearly through the database we have, or databases we have. Through the All Payer Claims database we would have health claims if somebody went to a provider, we would have a claim for that if they were covered by insurance, we'd have a record of that. We'd also have through our hospital reporting system. Anytime someone comes in, there's claims and there's discharge data that we get related to that. We also have obviously charge, I was speaking with Representative Perillo before, before I got up here about the Certificate of Need process with respect to recovery centers and facilities coming in for treatment, we have a role there. And finally, we have a role of convening right now that we're actually doing with Commissioner Seagull's team, and other state agencies around opioids and one of the things we're looking at is tying the prescription drug monitoring program to the health information exchange so providers can see, you know when somebody's accessed a prescription or filled a prescription. They can provide better care to them. They can probably
intercede sooner so yes; we have a role to play there.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): I thought we did tie the electronic component a couple of years ago to the prescription, to the physician, but I could be wrong.

VICTORIA VELTRI: They are tied to physician.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): They're tied, yeah.

VICTORIA VELTRI: The physicians do look up on the PDMP, the once again, health acronym, PDMP, the Prescription Drug Monitoring System. They can look up fills, like if somebody fills a prescription. This would just tie it to the complete electronic health record so you're tying the prescription to what the patient's visits look like so it's a much broader.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Two more items, I'm sorry to, but, what, how does telemedicine? How do you feel about telemedicine playing a role in certain circumstances?

VICTORIA VELTRI: We support it. We have, in our work on health and payment delivery reform, we have a project going, Primary Care Modernization, and telemedicine plays a very big role there. We know it plays a big role, not just for patients who cannot often see a provider in a certain area, let's say for behavioral health services or something like that, but it also plays a role for practitioners and for patients who cannot easily access a specialist. Practitioners often use a mechanism that we call E-consult where they can basically get in touch with
let's say a cardiologist and send a record to a cardiologist and have a consult electronically and bring that consult back in to decide whether the patient even needs to go to a cardiologist so we're very supportive of it.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Yeah I think in some circumstances it works really well. And then, so when you have all the data from the 2019, like I said, the homelessness and the hospital delivery of care, do you make recommendations, for the delivery of care, do you make recommendations back to the hospital as far as you're spending too much here, it costs too much here, we need more services here. You have to have some sort of, you have to do something with this data.

VICTORIA VELTRI: That's exactly what we are hoping to do. That's exactly what we are hoping to do and we will see price variations. We will see delivery challenges. We will see gaps in care. We will see all of that and that's what we hope to do and really, through a collaborative process right and we hope to have a fuller look at the cost picture so that we can make recommendations about how better to contain costs in the state and we do need to do that.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): And then finally, some hospitals, not enough, they'll have like clinics. Instead of using the emergency room, they would have residents go to the clinic, care that costs much less expensive.

VICTORIA VELTRI: Absolutely.
REP. YACCARINO (87TH): And it's immediate care. Hopefully we can have more support of that.

VICTORIA VELTRI: Absolutely. We would always encourage, we encourage, avoidance of emergency departments when you don't need to go to the emergency department and so what we've been keeping an eye with that is just whether, we think the urgent care makes a lot of sense. What we also are gonna look at over time I think is the cost associated with that and whether there are facility fees tied to that and things of that nature that might put additional costs on the patient so we're just gonna keep following that for now and see how it works out but in general, you don't want people going to the emergency department. We'd rather have people have adequate primary care which is why our office is so focused on spending more money on primary care and less on other types of care if we can get there. That's our goal.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Well, thank you for what you're doing and answering all the questions and thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Yaccarino. The floor now goes to Representative Davis.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and congratulations on your reappointment.

VICTORIA VELTRI: Thank you.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): One thing that strikes me with what your office is doing now with all of this data that's available to you and your collection of it is
potentially valuable to us as policy makers for going after fraud and abuse, and I don't think that was something that's been mentioned yet here today and that you would be kind of, it appears to be other than perhaps maybe the comptroller's office and direct information about the state healthcare plan, but for Medicaid especially, access to that kind of information and the ability to provide to us what type of things we could do to cut down on that fraud, either by the actual Medicaid recipient which I imagine is less often than the actual care provider that is the one committing the fraud.

VICTORIA VELTRI: Yeah, program integrity is actually one of the things we've been looking at in the technology part of the office and we've had a lot of discussions with DSF simply because we have the APCD and Medicaid data is gonna be in there. Medicaid does a phenomenal job I will say right now on that work and they have an incredibly robust data warehouse, and I'm actually very pleased that they're sharing their data with us because we can put data together. We can put the Medicaid data together along with the commercial data and to me, that's really critical because people move. They don't always just stay in one sort of health coverage so seeing a full picture is very valuable for that reason and many others.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Thank you and would it be within your purview of your office to make recommendations to the legislature on ways to improve fraud and things like that?

VICTORIA VELTRI: Absolutely. I think we see our role as pretty broad. You know, we have a job, our
statute actually demands that we create a comprehensive and cohesive vision of health for the state and that's one component is naturally that. You do have to look at program integrity. That is an absolute must in any evaluation of programs or recommendations.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): And the availability of this data, as you mentioned, is on the commercial side of things as well so I would imagine that the ability to look at it for them as well for the vast majority of residents of the State of Connecticut that use commercial or private healthcare and the ability to help drive down costs that way by detecting these things through this information that's available to us. Also, a question regarding the healthcare or the health information exchange and the medical records that are available to us, and from my conversations you know just where my district is in North Central Connecticut, we have access to a number of different hospital systems, and it appears to me from my conversations with them is that they're all operating on different systems and how difficult it can be especially being where I am, where sometimes a certain type of emergency, you're brought to a certain type of hospital, and then at other times, you're brought to other ones and that information may not be readily available especially to first responders, but also to the hospitals when they get there. What's going on with trying to make that a more seamless activity for people that are in need?

VICTORIA VELTRI: Well you couldn't have summarized the challenge better because that's the exact
challenge. Intra-operability is challenge number one and getting that information to other providers who you don’t traditionally think of necessarily needing that data is challenge number two. We've taken on both of those things head-on. We have said in creating the health information exchange what we don’t want to do is have providers who already have systems to have to rebuild and reinvest right? That would be a waste of time and money for them so the key is connection. It's not rebuilding.

So our view, which is a similar view that the federal government has now on health information exchange, is to build a way to exchange data without reinventing the wheel and to come up with this trust framework for sharing information. So we are working with every single hospital system, every kind of provider you can imagine from long-term care to behavioral health. We're working with first responders through mobile integrated health work group that we have on this very issue. That is just a direct challenge we're taking on. We're not gonna solve that problem like this, but we feel pretty strongly that the model we've got is the model of the future and I think our federal partners agree with us on that so I feel very confident we're moving in the right direction.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Davis. Any other member of the Committee who like, Senator Looney?
SEN. LOONEY (11TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman and good afternoon. You have done a superb job in your state service up to this point going back to working closely with you together on behalf of constituents at the Office of Healthcare Access and you were great in terms of solving some of those thorny problems of helping to find a path to coverage for people who were really struggling, and now with the Office of Health Strategy I think is more and more as we grapple with what the ultimate solution in terms of healthcare is gonna be in terms of both quality and affordability of care. I can't think of anybody who'd I rather have in that position than you so congratulations.

VICTORIA VELTRI: Thank you very much.

REP. DAVIS (57TH): Thank you, Senator Looney. Representative Godfrey?

REP. GODFREY (110TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Congratulations!

VICTORIA VELTRI: Thank you.

REP. GODFREY (110TH): I'm delighted, it's like a decade and a half working with us here and in the state. I commend your knowledge and your experience and more even importantly, I think your compassion and your passion for delving into a very complicated set of circumstances, making it simpler, making it easier for us on the policy side to understand, and you're showing that here today. And I'm also glad, if I could just make a personal point, you know I served with your dad here in the House with great fondness. He was just a great guy and obviously he brought you up right.
VICTORIA VELTRI: Thank you [laughs].

REP. GODFREY (110TH): So I'm delighted that you have this appointment. I've been, I'm from Danbury, use Danbury Hospital and the Western Connecticut Health Network, and I'm their worst nightmare because I've been a patient [laughs] and I happened to be talking to a constituent last night in a far ranging kind of discussion and we talked about hospitals and healthcare. He and his wife just had their second baby and I was getting a lot of those anecdotal stories and he said which almost frightened me, really. It was hospitals don't do healthcare, they don't heal, they're meat factories, that was his term, which kind of frightened me. And I'll tell you, as a patient, I can understand that. The compassion and the quality and the knowledge for example of their, the staff who deal directly with patients is exemplary, but their short on personnel. Morale is horrible and even they have opined that the merger mania has switched from real healthcare to how do we bill and how do we keep the money flowing. What should I tell him? [laughs].

VICTORIA VELTRI: Well, I mean, first of all, I think help is on the horizon. I think there are bumps in this road to transform healthcare. This is a big undertaking that the hospital systems have been on a path of and it does take years, you know to get this right. What I say often and I really do believe is, it took us a long time to get where we are, and so it's gonna take a while to sort of unwind and get us to an ideal place. That doesn't help a patient who's in, you know crisis at that particular moment. I will say the hospitals all
have patient-family advisory councils and they also have patient buzz men or buzz women that work very well with patients, and that's the person to whom I send patients when there's an issue. I find them to be very proactive in trying to resolve instant situations quite rapidly.

The longer term haul is gonna take a while and my sort of solution to that and what I think about is hospitals do a good job for the care that they have to provide. What we need is to keep people from having to go when they don't need to go. So we have to invest more on the other side of the equation. We have to spend more time getting people into primary care, more time getting people to pay attention to preventive care and care that they can afford so that they don’t have to go to the hospital unless they absolutely need to but that's gonna take a little while. That's the path we're on.

REP. GODFREY (110TH): If I was starting from scratch, I wouldn’t design things the way they are now that's for true and I've been a big supporter of preventative medicine for a very long mom. My mother was a registered nurse before she retired so I get it all from that perspective and it's good to have those buzz men, but one of the anecdotes I was hearing last night was, my wife's in labor and I can't get anybody to come over and give her an epidural. That's not the kind of thing you can appeal to a bureaucracy and that's because they were short-staffed and that continues to be a problem. And I know you follow this so --

VICTORIA VELTRI: Yeah, I do and that's a situation, so if there were something before us and actually, I
can't really speak to anything out there because there are applications in front of us, but in the CON process, we have inserted application questions specifically about quality of care, staffing is in there, etc. So we are I think taking a little more aggressive approach on probing those applications pretty deeply around quality and not just quality meaning a quality measure like if diabetes rates have gone down, but patient safety is also a huge issue that needs to be probed more. That part of the equation, I'd like to get to. We haven't quite gotten there, but I would really like to get there.

REP. GODFREY (110TH): I'm so supportive of that again, just from personal experience with my family and myself. That needs a good hard look at in order to improve the overall quality so the other piece I hear most complaints about, from constituents of course, is prescription costs and I know Comptroller Lembo has been authorized to do the big study regarding prices, prizing which is a couple of three years out as I recall, and delves particularly with the transparency within the pharmaceutical industry, but when I'm doing door-to-door just, you know meeting people in a diner that's what I hear the most complaints about and I have to say, even in my own experience, they're right. When I've had diabetes, I'm not on insulin now, but I was for a little while when I was first diagnosed, the cost of which is covered under my insurance, but listening to what pharmaceutical companies are doing to prices, just skyrocketing them with absolutely no basis, you know, artificial insulin was invented in the 1920s. The two guys that did it won the Nobel Prize and they didn't put a patent on it, but now
we've got pharmaceutical companies just charging hundreds and hundreds of dollars per dose and if you're taking a dose with every meal and overnight, that's thousands of dollars a day and I think nationally and globally, we really need to address that. What do you think?

VICTORIA VELTRI: I couldn't agree with you more. We have to address the rate of growth prescription drug costs. The bill that you're referring to which is Public Act 1841 that passed last year, we actually have a pretty role in that bill. When the prescription drug companies make a decision to raise prices on a particular drug between, I can't remember the amount off the top of my head to be honest, somewhere between 20 and 30 percent.

REP. GODFREY (110TH): Percentage, yeah.

VICTORIA VELTRI: They have to report to us what they're doing and justify that. I will say part of the challenge on prescription drugs is that we are preempted from doing a lot here as a state. We can do some backdoor things like we're trying to do through this bill, we can do some stuff around PBM's, let's say, but in terms of regulating price, that's an area where the federal government sort of retained the authority, so it's a very difficult climb and I see that because as a member of Access Health Board, we try to design our plans and every year we're struggling about which tier to put drugs on and that means consumers face higher costs. But that just goes to the overall cost of care equation which is we gotta do stuff to get people's care better attended to. We need to prevent things from happening to the degree we can, bring those costs
down so when we have to cover things like prescription drugs, they become affordable. There's room in there to cover them, but there's no question action needs to be taken.

REP. GODFREY (110TH): I so appreciate that. You know I talk to my mother's friends, the nurses, you know they're not seeing huge raises. They strike just to try and keep their head above water financially so the cost increases that have been phenomenal certainly aren't in personnel on the caregiver side. I could go on for hours about overhead and the ridiculous salaries that we're paying some administrators and, but when people get a bill and they start seeing, even if it's covered by their insurance, what the cost you know of anything from an aspirin to a pain killer or something like insulin that needs to be taken forever, they're shocked and they're angry, so I appreciate that your following this, that you're participating in this and I hope we can do, we've gotta persuade the federal government to let us negotiate drug prices. That would be a huge, huge step forward. Thank you.

VICTORIA VELTRI: You're welcome.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Representative Godfrey. Any other member of the Committee wishing at this point to make a comment or ask a question. If not, well I want to congratulate you again on your appointment and wish you all the best and before I let you go, there's one question that I ask of all our nominees. Is there anything in your past that you believe would prove embarrassing either to
this committee, to the Governor or to the State of Connecticut?

VICTORIA VELTRI: No.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well then, thank you very much and that concludes this portion of the public hearing. Now, we allow, when we conclude all the entries with the nominees, we allow the public to speak, and I understand there is one speaker who would like to speak regarding the appointment of Beth Bye to the Office of Early Childhood and that's Eva Bermudez Zimmerman. Is Eva here with us? Ah, here she is.

EVA BERMUDEZ ZIMMERMAN: I'm not a newbie and I said yeah. There you go, nice and clear for the cameras. So, thank you, the Committee, for this opportunity and thank you for taking up much time to hear the new appointed commissioners and to hear from the audience and the community. My name is Eva Bermudez Zimmerman. I'm here on the behalf of CSEA SEIU. Our childcare union is part of a larger union that represents retirees, state employees, municipal employees and centers, early education centers. In my capacity as a childcare director for CSEA SEIU, we have right now over 5000 providers that are part of our jurisdiction through Care for Kids. We also have multiple centers, Head Start centers and private centers that all, through the process of Care for Kids, go through payment and also subsidies like early childcare and Head Start programs and that's why it's so important for us to take the time out and support the new Commissioner, Beth Bye. So I and the union, our union members wholeheartedly support the appointment of Beth Bye.
Through the Office of Early Childhood as Commissioner, we would be ecstatic to have her on board. Through the last few years, we've had a little bit of turmoil through the educators. There was a time where Care for Kids shut down and we had to reinstate it with funding and the assistance of the legislators that are in this room, so thank you for that, but because of these program cuts and the subsidy cuts, we wanna make sure that the person that's appointed fully understands the importance of legislators being connected to the issues and the community, and also with her background of being a former Senator, I'll know that she'll that ambition and that clear decisive decision to make sure that we have connection between the community with the union and also with legislators to help the funding and also help with programs like Care for Kids.

I submitted testimony so I'll just make sure that you have that and if you have any questions, let me know but I just wanted to be sure that we were supporting Beth Bye as a new Commissioner.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Well SEIU has shown its extremely keen and good judgement in supporting Beth Bye because if you were here during her confirmation hearing, I think it was unanimous that we all agree that she'll make a great Commissioner for the Office of Early Childhood so thank you so much for being here in support of her. Are there any questions from anyone? If not, I want to thank and we will put your written testimony into the record too and as a matter of fact, we have two testimonies, written testimonies that we'll put into the record. One is again from Eva Bermudez Zimmerman supporting
Beth Bye, and the second one that I wish to enter into the record is testimony submitted by Debra R. Hoyt, President and CEO of the Connecticut Association for Healthcare at Home. She has submitted a letter in support of the nomination of Victoria L. Veltri who we just heard from a minute ago the be the Executive Director of the Office of Health Strategy so if there's no further member of the public that wishes to speak, no further communications, written communications, that concludes our public hearing and we will keep the votes open until 6 p.m. we have some Senators that are on the road so we've agreed to keep the vote open until then and I'll ask the Clerk to announce our next meeting. Our next meeting?

CLERK: The next hearing and meeting will be on February 14, 11 o'clock.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): February 14, that'll be the next public hearing. All right, now that concludes the public hearing. We'll stretch for a minute and then we'll conclude the business meeting and a vote on the nominees.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): All right let's call our business portion of the meeting to order. We have before us five nominees, the first one being a House Resolution for Commissioner Kurt Wesby of Middletown, Connecticut to run the Department of Labor. Is there a motion?

SEN. LOONEY (11TH): So moved.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): It's been properly moved. Is there a second?
SEN. FASANO (34TH):  Second.

REP. VARGAS (6TH):  Properly moved and seconded. Since this is a House Resolution, the Clerk will take a roll of the House members of the Committee.

CLERK:  Vargas?
REP. VARGAS (6TH):  Yes.
CLERK:  Phipps?
REP. PHIPPS (100TH):  Yes.
CLERK:  Perillo?
REP. PERILLO (113TH):  Yes.
CLERK:  D'Agostino?
REP. D'AGONSTINO (91ST):  Yes.
CLERK:  Davis?
REP. DAVIS (57TH):  Yes.
CLERK:  DiMassa?
REP. DIMASSA (116TH):  Yes.
CLERK:  Godfrey?
REP. GODFREY (110TH):  Yes.
CLERK:  Verrengia?
REP. VERRENGIA (20TH):  Yes.
CLERK:  Yaccarino?
REP. YACCARINO (87TH):  Yes.

REP. VARGAS (6TH):  Now, we will go the second nominee which is a Senate Resolution and the Chair
recognizes our President Pro Tempore Senator Looney for the purposes of entering the name of Rollin Cook into nomination. Senator Looney?

SEN. LOONEY (11TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would move a favorable vote on the Senate Resolution nominating Rollin Cook to be the Commissioner of Corrections.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): Second the motion.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Properly moved and seconded, moved by Senator Looney, seconded by our ranking member, Senator Fasano. The Clerk will now take, since this is a Senate Resolution, the Clerk will take a roll call of the Senate members of the Committee.

CLERK: Senator Duff?
SEN. DUFF (25TH): Yes.

CLERK: Looney?
SEN. LOONEY (11TH): Yes.

CLERK: Fasano?
SEN. FASANO (34TH): Yes.

CLERK: Bergstein?
SEN. BERGSTEIN (36TH): Yes.

CLERK: Formica?
SEN. FORMICA (20TH): Yes.

CLERK: Hartley?
SEN. HARTLEY (15TH): Yes.
CLERK: Kushner?

SEN. KUSHNER (24TH): Yes.

CLERK: Moore?

SEN. MOORE (22ND): Yes.

CLERK: Witkos.

SEN. WITKOS (8TH): Yes.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): And as I stated before, the vote will be open until 6:00 p.m. so that the Senators who are in other meetings or on the road can cast their vote on the Senate Resolutions. The next is Michelle Seagull [inaudible - 00:02:29] with Commissioner of Consumer Protection. The Chair recognizes Senator Looney.

SEN. LOONEY (11TH): I'll yield to Senator Fasano.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Oh, Senator Fasano.

SEN. FASANO (34TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I would like to make for Commissioner of Consumer Protection Michelle Seagull of Glastonbury to be said Commissioner.

SEN. LOONEY (11TH): Second that Mr. Chairman.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Okay, so this was moved by Senator Fasano, seconded by Senator Looney. There's been no Senator leaving the room or entering the room so we can just proceed. Is there any change on the vote or both vote of the affirmative? Then we can just reflect the previous vote and this brings us to the next nominee, Elizabeth Bye of West Hartford.
SENATOR LOONEY (11TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, it's my great pleasure to place a nomination in the name of our former colleague, Senator Beth Bye, Elizabeth Bye of West Hartford to be Commissioner of Early Childhood.

SENATOR FASANO (34TH): Second the motion.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): All right. Properly moved by Senator Looney and properly seconded by Senator Fasano that Elizabeth Bye of West Hartford be the Commissioner of Early Childhood. Is there any change in the previous vote? Seeing no change in the previous vote, will the Clerk reflect that both are in the affirmative? And that brings us the last nominee for our meeting, Victoria L. Veltri of Colchester, Connecticut. The floor recognizes Senate Fasano?

SEN. FASANO (34TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Mr. Chairman, I'd like to place a nomination, we'll just call her Vicky Veltri of Colchester as the Executive Director of the Office of Health Strategy.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Is there a second?

Yes, Mr. Chairman, it's my great pleasure to second the nomination of Vicky Veltri to be our Executive Director of the Office of Health Strategy.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Very good. It's been properly moved by Senator Fasano and seconded by Senator Looney that Vicky Veltri of Colchester be the Executive Director of the Office of Health Strategy. Is there any change in the previous three votes? Seeing none, will the Clerk reflect that those votes were in the affirmative and the votes will be open
until 6:00 p.m. Having no further business before the Committee, we now recess until 6:00 p.m. Thank you.