

Public Safety and Security Committee JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: SB-572

AN ACT CONCERNING COMMUNITY CRISIS RESPONSE TEAMS AND

Title: REENTRY CENTERS.

Vote Date: 3/24/2021

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 2/11/2021

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Public Safety and Security Committee

REASONS FOR BILL:

Currently law enforcement is called upon to handle many crisis situations in which they do not have the same level of training as other professionals. There are many instances that the outcome is negative – and more violent than necessary. This bill would establish an alternative police response program and support individuals reentering the community from prison. Many unnecessary violent outcomes may be avoided.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Miriam Delphin-Rittman, Commissioner, Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services – The testimony received supports this legislation. DMHAS currently provides mobile emergency crisis services to residents eighteen years of age or older. The services offered by DMHAS range from the prevention of crisis among persons and families to postvention services. Many of these services and supports assist people in developing a meaningful sense of belonging to their communities to the reduction in the need of arrests in favor of referrals to appropriate community resources and supports. These services can lead to promotion of safety for persons in crisis, the entire community as well as law enforcement. The community programs being offered by DMHAS have no additional funds for expansion at this time. An increase in funding would extend the reach of DMHAS and assist more people in crisis in our communities.

Neil M. O’Leary, Mayor, City of Waterbury – The testimony submitted is in support of this legislation. It was noted that as of 9/10/2020 men who call Waterbury their home comprises

8.4% of the total incarcerated population in the state, while 7.4% of the incarcerated women also call Waterbury their home. Reentry centers provide a comprehensive effort to provide better opportunities to men and women returning to their homes after prison, as well as meaningful on-going support. These centers and their support offer the men and women who have recently left prison a better chance of reentering the community and decrease the number who will need re-incarceration. It was noted that The Hartford Reentry Center has served over 700 individuals since 2018, while only being funded for 150 people annually. This illustrates the need for Reentry centers in our state.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Kathleen Flaherty, Esq., Executive Director, CT Legal Rights Project, Inc. – The testimony offered by the CLRP supports the concept of SB 572 with some concerns and an outline for a new proposal. The testimony states that the CLRP feels that community members in crisis should not have to interact with law enforcement. The CLRP wants to know who will be designing the programs addressed in this bill and who will decide what someone's needs are. The testimony lays out a "bold proposal" of ten steps for communities who are trying to design an alternative to the current police response system. The CLRP feels that the current system is failing many residents, and the existing system does not keep us safe.

Achilles Generoso, Statewide Director, Project Longevity – This testimony is in support of SB 572. This legislation is the first step in ensuring that men and women returning home from prison will have a better chance to integrate back into their communities and society. Those returning from incarceration are disproportionately affected by issues relating to housing, employment, substance abuse, mental and medical illness. Reentry centers will ensure that people are connected to the services they need on the day they are released from prison. Fiscally, this legislation is a long-term investment to generate savings from the diversion of incarceration and the unnecessary use of emergency rooms. From a human perspective SB 572 attempts to reduce the on-going issues that affect communities of color.

Rev. Abraham Hernandez, Executive Chapter Director, CT Chapter of the National Hispanic Christian Leadership Conference – This testimony supports SB 572. This organization represents over 300 Hispanic Evangelical churches throughout the state. Reentry Centers will ensure that men and women released from prison will be able to meet with experts equipped and willing to provide support to connect these individuals with social services support on the day they are released from prison. By increasing funding in this area, long-term savings will be generated by the decrease in recidivism.

Rebecca Simonsen, Vice President, SEIU 1199NE – The testimony submitted is in favor of this legislation. The testimony notes that DMHAS funds many mobile crisis units throughout the state. The work done by these professionals is very important in many crisis situations. These professionals (social workers and first responders) are more equipped to respond to mental health and addiction crisis situations, rather than law enforcement. Statistics indicate that people with mental health issues are sixteen times more likely to be killed by police. Many of these deaths may be unnecessary, if trained mental health care workers were responding to crisis situations. District 1199 feels that Mobile Crisis services promote the most effective strategy in responding to mental health emergencies, thus preventing suicides

and other deaths. Mobile Crisis services are needed now more than ever – and they are operating on lean budgets leaving big gaps in services at night and on the weekends.

Louise C. Pyers, M.S., B.C.E.T.S. – This testimony supports SB 572. Evidence shows that more funding is needed to support to increase the capacity of our state funded Mobile Crisis teams. Many of these teams only are funded Monday through Friday 9:00 AM to 4:00 PM , leaving law enforcement on their own to respond crisis situations at night and on the weekends.

Beth Hines, Executive Director, Community Partners in Action – The testimony supports the legislation. The testimony addresses the issues that currently disproportionately affect communities of color. The Community Crisis Response Team (CCRT) will limit the unneeded law enforcement contact by dispatching appropriately qualified professionals to respond to emergency and non-emergency calls. This legislation is also the first step in ensuring that men and women coming home from prison have more support in their efforts to reintegrate into society. The legislation will also have long-term savings by decreasing the amount of unnecessary incarcerations, as well as trips to the emergency rooms.

Margaret Middleton, CEO, Columbus House, Inc. This testimony supports SB 572. The testimony noted the disproportionate nature of issues that face communities of color throughout the state. CCRT's will limit the amount of unnecessary law enforcement contact in crisis situations by dispatching appropriately trained personnel to respond to emergency and non-emergency calls. The program will provide a support system for those individuals who do not need to be incarcerated, but rather need connection to treatment services and other programs during the moment of crisis. The testimony also noted that working with men and women just prior to their release from prison Increases the probability of a positive reentry into communities.

Kelly McCooney Moore, Interim Senior Policy Counsel, ACLU – CT – This testimony supports the legislation. The idea of community-based crisis response to people in mental health emergencies is long past due. Statistics show that law enforcement response to people with mental health emergencies is inadequate and often times leads to unnecessary violence. Additionally, minorities are more likely to be killed in these situations than white people. Community-based responders save more lives as we as police time and resources. Similar programs implemented in other states have been successful and have seen a decrease in unnecessary law enforcement violence.

Alison Weir, Policy Advocate and Staff Attorney, Greater Hartford Legal Aid – This testimony supports SB 572. This legislation disrupts the potential road back to prison in two ways – first, that the right type of response is provided to address those in crisis, and second – that those reentering society have the necessary tools available to them to become a productive member of the community. Reentry centers are an important tool in assisting individuals to create a strong foundation so they may contribute to the community. Additionally, the testimony points out that police are asked to handle many calls that would be better addressed by social workers or mental health providers in such issues as homelessness, substance abuse or mental health,

Hartford Foundation for Public Giving – This testimony supports SB 572. In 2017, the Foundation provided a three-year \$450,000 grant to the Community Partners in Action, along

with the collaboration of other nonprofit and government partners, to launch the Greater Hartford Reentry Welcome Center. The City of Hartford provided the space and the staff to provide additional support. This public-private partnership has been working to change the course of the lives of men and women from prison at the end of their sentences. The Foundation funded an evaluation of the Center's first year and found that this collaboration was an effective way to ensure returning men and women an immediate way to receive services and support in their reintegration in the community,

Paul Acker, Constituent, Portland – The testimony submitted supports the bill. As part of CCRT's I would ask that the state start looking into Peer Respite programs. Peer Respite gives people going through crisis a chance to work with peers who have had similar crisis. These respite programs are entirely staffed gone through crisis themselves. The state currently does not have a program based on a peer run model. These programs have been effective in other states.

Janet M. Carter, PhD, Constituent, New Haven – This testimony supports SB 572 and the notion of working to establish peer respite facilities in the state. This is a different alternative of addressing the crisis and care needs throughout the state. According to Mental Health America (2018) peer support programs have led to decreased inpatient stays, reduced rehospitalization and an overall cost of services to the taxpayers in the state. A peer respite program option will involve community members who have experienced these situations and provide a recovery approach to crisis and care that is more peer supported and more cost effective.

Mollie Greenwood, Constituent, West Hartford – The testimony submitted supports SB 572. CCRT programs will create a support system to deal with individuals who should not be incarcerated but rather the opportunity to get connected to treatment and services during their moment of crisis. Mollie notes that she worked in homeless services for over five years and during that time witnessed many instances of incarceration to vulnerable individuals experiencing homelessness and compounded by their mental care issues of the day-to-day stress of not knowing where they would stay at night. The social services approach to these law enforcement issues will reduce incarceration rates and the unnecessary trips to emergency rooms. SB 572 will address the first step by ensuring men and women returning from prison a better chance of reentry into society. This bill will have long-term savings by reducing unnecessary incarcerations and usage of emergency rooms.

There were sixteen other pieces of testimony from various groups and constituents that supported the proposed legislation.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

There was none submitted.

Reported by: Richard O'Neil

Date: 4-7-2021

