Lucy Nolan, Director of Policy and Public Relations  
March 22, 2021  
Committee on the Judiciary

**In Support of SB 1059 AN ACT CONCERNING THE CORRECTION ACCOUNTABILITY COMMISSION, THE OFFICE OF THE CORRECTION OMBUDS, THE USE OF ISOLATED CONFINEMENT, SECLUSION AND RESTRAINTS, SOCIAL CONTACTS FOR INCARCERATED PERSONS AND TRAINING AND WORKERS’ COMPENSATION BENEFITS FOR CORRECTION OFFICERS.**

Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom and members of the Judiciary Committee. My name is Lucy Nolan. I am the Director of Policy and Public Relations at the Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence, the statewide coalition of Connecticut’s nine community-based sexual assault crisis services centers. Our mission is to create communities free of sexual violence and to provide culturally affirming trauma-informed advocacy and prevention centered on the voices of survivors.

Nationally, approximately 86% of incarcerated women are survivors of sexual violence and twenty percent of male inmates are sexually abused during their incarceration.¹ Those male inmates who had been sexually victimized prior to their incarceration were approximately two to five times more likely to report sexual victimization inside prison during a 6-month time period than their counterparts who had no sexual victimization prior to age 18.² The long-term emotional impact of sexual abuse in detention often includes Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, substance abuse, and other negative health and mental health outcomes tied to experiencing trauma. Periods of isolation often compound and increase the likelihood that survivors will experience negative health outcomes and may also impact their ability to receive mental health and community-based support to mitigate the impacts of their trauma.

The Alliance supports SB 1059 AN ACT CONCERNING THE CORRECTION ACCOUNTABILITY COMMISSION, THE OFFICE OF THE CORRECTION OMBUDS, THE USE OF ISOLATED CONFINEMENT, SECLUSION AND RESTRAINTS, SOCIAL CONTACTS FOR INCARCERATED PERSONS AND TRAINING AND WORKERS’ COMPENSATION BENEFITS FOR CORRECTION OFFICERS. The bill identifies sexual assaults as a serious incident, specific rules for the use of sequestration and restraint, requires data to be captured on incidences which is sorely needed in Connecticut, and requires access for phone use and letter writing.

The Alliance supports the training to recognize trauma and increased knowledge of techniques for mitigating trauma and vicarious trauma, as well as increased emphasis on the wellness of employees including strategies to prevent and treat vicarious trauma. Sexual assault is one of the most psychologically damaging crimes and it impacts entire families, institutions, and communities which are likely to experience negative long-term health and mental health consequences. Sexual assault is the leading cause of PTSD and the body’s automatic reaction to trauma can result in the impairment of rational thought and collective memory. The neurobiological processes controlling victim behavior during and after a sexual assault can appear highly counterintuitive to those who have not received trauma-centered training; therefore, training

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¹ California Coalition Against Sexual Assault, Survivors Behind Bars: Supporting Survivors of Prison Rape and Sexual Assault, 2010
remains critical to building skill sets of those responding to sexual assault and working with survivors of sexual violence.

In the bill these training and wellness programs are only funded through available appropriations and, as such, are unlikely to become available without appropriated funding. A cursory review of sexual abuse in prison makes it clear that there is a distinct lack of support to appropriately and effectively support both victims and the staff responsible for their care. Sexual violence and sexual assault happen more often than reported and when it is reported, victims are left with a lack of action and support from the institution. Since reporting does not reap any benefits, many victims share they do not report for fear of making their circumstances worse.

Justice-impacted survivors must have access to trained staff support and institutional interventions as trauma and re-traumatization are part of the incarceration experience for many incarcerated people. This bill has solid and practical steps to reduce trauma for justice-impacted survivors.

Treating the symptoms of new incidents of inmate-on-inmate or staff-on-inmate victimization without changing the prison culture and climate is likely to be better than nothing but probably as effective as treating combat trauma in a war zone. Real value for the treatment dollar would require changing the prison environment in ways that make it more humanizing, more healthy, more habitable, and, hence, more in keeping with the long-term societal goals and expectations of public safety and rehabilitation.³

One of the most important methods to change our carceral system is by creating a trauma-informed culture. We urge the committee to request funding for the trauma-informed programs.

The bill also promotes inmate communication with the outside world through access to letter writing and phone calls. Survivors can reach out to their external support networks and maintain contact with people in their lives who provide them with emotional support. There is already institutionalized access to The Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual Violence’s statewide free and confidential sexual assault crisis hotline; however, to access non-crisis services and ongoing support, incarcerated survivors needed to make appointments through their Department of Corrections counselor or social worker and set up appointments outside of the statewide crisis hotline. Incarcerated survivors having the ability to communicate with their sexual assault crisis counselor and trusted family, friends, or other advocates can help victims of sexual trauma reach out for help as they need it in real time. Connection to others is a critical part of healing for survivors of sexual violence and can help restore survivors’ wellbeing.

Our advocates have worked with justice-impacted and incarcerated survivors who, upon reporting a sexual assault, were placed into protective custody or solitary confinement which limited their freedom and caused further harm. When a person is suffering through a trauma being left alone is not an adequate treatment and alternatives to isolation need to be identified to create safety for victims and to not compound their victimization. We support the bill’s proposal to limit the amount of time that a person is in seclusion.

The Alliance is also supportive of the Correction Ombuds as it will give victims of sexual abuse a way to safely and confidentially report sexual violence. Sexual violence is about power and control which is reinforced in correctional structures and it leaves the most vulnerable with no avenues for help. The Corrections Ombuds is a step in the right direction to stopping sexual violations of incarcerated persons.

The Alliance supports the passage of SB 1059 and urges the committee to fully fund training on trauma recognition and intervention.

Thank you.

³ Nancy Wolff, PhD, Jing Shi, MS, and Jane A. Siegel, PhD, Patterns of Victimization Among Male and Female Inmates: Evidence of an Enduring Legacy, Violence Vict. 2009; 24(4): 469–484.