Testimony of Imani Sharrif Pennant
Member of Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice
Testimony for the Judicial Committee Public Hearing
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.
March 22nd, 2021

Good afternoon Sen. Winfield, Rep. Stafstrom, and members of the Judiciary Committee,

My name is Imani Sharrif Pennant. As a member of the Katal Center for Equity, Health, and Justice, I strongly support passage of SB-1059, the PROTECT Act.

The PROTECT Act is monumental in changing the very fabric of how the inside of prisons operate. The immense ripple effects of passing a substantial bill like SB 1059 will indubitably show positive and productive byproducts in our communities.

Right now, the inside of prisons are built to break its incarcerated individuals in every way, especially psychologically. It is a place built to take your faith and leave you uninspired. Prisons warp and dehumanizes your natural way of interacting with people to the point you can’t even function in normal society. Most people who go into prison end up worse than before they went in because of the trauma and the mental health repercussions.

One year ago today, I was sitting in solitary confinement in the Connecticut Department of Corrections. I was placed in solitary confinement because I wrote a letter to the warden of the MacDougall-Walker Correctional Institution trying to address concerns about the inhuman conditions we were subjected to. We were experiencing things like black mold in the showers, the shortening of recreation, being fed expired food, and many other things. For the letter to the warden, I ended up getting signatures from every last incarcerated individual in my tier which totaled up to over 115 signatures. A few days later after sending the letter I was placed in the box, the reasoning being I was inciting a riot. All I asked was to be treated like a human and the immediate response was unjustified and inhumane punishment.

The Correctional Officer’s that placed me in the box didn't want to do it at all and yet were forced to. This is another reason why I support the PROTECT Act so much, because staff

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members alike are adversely affected by this punitive system. Staff members of the DOC are incentivized to treat their fellow human beings as animals and are told to go against their natural inclinations of compassion and care. The long term effects for working a job like this corrodes the mental health state and well-being of those employed. So this is not just an issue concerning the humanity of people who are incarcerated, but an issue concerning the humanity of everyone in the DOC.

At the onset of the legislative session we at Katal began our #CutShutINVEST campaign for which we seek to:

- **Cut** the number of people incarcerated in jails and prisons. Cut the number of people on probation and parole;
- **Shut** prison down;
- **Invest** in the communities most harmed by systemic racism and mass incarceration, into housing, healthcare, education, jobs, and more.

At Katal, we support the PROTECT Act, and we support Stop Solitary CT's ongoing and rigorous efforts to see that Northern CI not only be closed, but demolished. We have to put an end to the harmful and tortuous practices at Northern Correctional Institution, and ensure that those practices are not recycled to other parts of the Connecticut Department of Corrections.

I humbly and graciously thank you for your time and for giving me the opportunity to testify at today’s hearing.

Thank you,

Imani Sharrif Pennant