Judiciary Committee
March 22, 2021
Submitted by: Stephen Wanczyk-Karp, LMSW

The National Association of Social Workers, CT Chapter supports Bill 1059. NASW/CT opposes the punitive and inhumane practice of solitary confinement, while we support the creation of an Ombuds program.

As stated in Social Work Speaks, Social Work in the Criminal Justice System, 2017, “Based on recent data, over the course of a year nearly one in five U.S. prisoners spend time in solitary confinement, which is approximately 400,000 people each year. The most pressing concern about the use of isolation in jails and prisons is the mental health implications. It is irrefutable that segregation, especially over the long term, can result in serious, potentially permanent mental health dysfunctions, including anxiety, depression, anger, cognitive disturbances, perceptual distortions, obsessive thought, paranoia, and psychosis.”

Correctional facilities have become the de facto institution for persons with severe mental health illnesses. Also due to episodic mental health crises, persons with serious mental health illnesses tend to be arrested frequently for behaviorally related infractions and enter a revolving door of being in and out of jail. These individuals are in need of mental health services, not repeated incarceration. In fact, incarceration may only worsen the mental health status of such individuals. Prolonged incarceration that includes solitary confinement has been found to cause a form of PTSD known as postincarceration syndrome. This will heighten the already underlying mental health problems of the individual.

Significant increase in mental health services is needed in our state’s correctional facilities. Employment of additional clinical social workers and other mental health providers who are trained in the treatment of PTSD and severe mental illness, is a much better approach then use of restricted housing and solitary confinement.
Bill 1059 calls for an Ombuds program that we fully support. This model has been extremely successful in health care where the Healthcare Advocate (originally the Managed Care Ombudsman) performs many of the functions that the Ombuds would perform for the correctional population.

NASW/CT also supports the bill’s provisions on visitation rights. Connection to family and other significant others will greatly assist the inmates in staying connected to their community and family and will have positive emotional and psychological benefits.