

CHAIRPERSONS: Senator Bob Duff,
Representative Joseph Gresko

SENATORS: Formica, Hartley, Kelly,
Looney, Moore, Somers

REPRESENTATIVES: Godfrey, Kennedy, Perillo,
Quinn, Vargas, Yaccarino

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Yeah. Okay, I will convene this meeting of the Executive and Legislative Nominations Committee to order for our public hearing that we will hear Angel Quiros Jr. of Windsor to be the Commissioner of the Department of Corrections. I'd ask Committee Members, most of whom are not on mute, but I put themselves on mute, so that we don't have any background noise. Thank you, everyone. And Commissioner, good morning. Glad that you're here. I'm looking around because you just moved.

ANGEL QUIROS: Morning.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Oh, here we are on the screen.

REP. KENNEDY (119TH): Senator Duff, you're on mute.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): With that, I just thank you.

REP. KENNEDY (119TH): Okay.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Thank you. We'll get started here. And if you -- Commissioner, if you could just raise your right hand. Thank you. Do you promise, swear, affirm to tell us the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

ANGEL QUIROS: I do.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): It -- and it's customary when we begin these -- our hearings, we allow the nominee to make an introductory statement, and then we'll

open up for questions after that. So, sir, the floor is yours. And, hopefully, everybody on the -- in the Committee received the testimony from the Commissioner. Thank you, sir. Floor is yours.

ANGEL QUIROS: Good morning, Senator Duff, Formica, Gresko, and Kennedy and the Members of Executive Legislative Nomination Committee. My name is Angel Quiros. I am proud to be sitting here today as the Governor's Lamont's appointee as a Department of Corrections next Commissioner. Before I share with the Committee the current status of the agency and plans I have for the future, I want to provide a little bit more of my background.

I grew up on Park Street in Hartford, just a few blocks from the Park Capitol. My father and my uncle own the neighborhood grocery store, where I saw first-hand the challenges of growing up and struggling environment. I was fortunate. I had strong supportive family who taught me the importance of community. And I've helped neighbors and me but also one that supported my drive to excel.

As a Buckley High School student, I was able to participate in Trinity College Upward Bound Summer Program, which led me to become the first person in my family to graduate from college, earning my Bachelor of Science Degree in Human Service from Springfield college, a study choice that was entirely due to my upbringing and my desire to help the community, my community.

It is also important for you to know that I have personal experience with the other side of the criminal justice system, as I have had justice involved family members, some have long stayed in correctional custody, during which they dramatically turned their lives around and became outstanding and contributing Connecticut residents. Some

unfortunately still continue to have contact with the criminal justice system and are struggling.

To these experience while living my own journey on the other side of the correctional system, I have seen that strong family support, opportunities while incarcerated, education and a job, housing and addressing health challenges can transform justice involved people. I'm also aware of how important it is for one to have a personal commitment to change in order to succeed.

As I sit here today, I'm beginning my 32nd year with this agency that I have invested my whole life in. I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge the impact of my career my choices on my wife, Madi, my son Angel, the long hours the holidays we delay, the vacations we didn't take at the time and they spent alone because the agency needed me -- needed me enough to string constrain any relationship but they understand the commitment over the years and have made that commitment their own, have supported me through every transition that I saw.

I will not be sitting here today without their ever present love and support. My career path has given me the opportunity to move through the ranks from Correction Officers, Lieutenant, Captain, Major, Deputy Warden, Warden of several facilities, including northern York, district administrators of both of our districts and finally, Deputy Commissioner of Operation of Rehabilitation Service on the former Commissioner Robin Cook.

I have overseen the working of our prison units and dorms, I have [inaudible], I have run facilities, I have coordinated the operation of multiple facilities, and I have managed our tactical treatment and program division. I've been charged of care of custody of female males, youth, adults, and all those incarcerated prior to the sentencing, as well as those centers for the crime.

I have seen the offender population grow rapidly and shrink significantly. I've seen our philosophy and law from being tough on crime to a more holistic, thoughtful, restorative approach and have been part of these changes our agency has gone through during the reform. I've seen the demands and qualifications of correctional staff adjust to reflect these changes. Everything in bottle -- embodies correctional practice, both historical and current. I've lived; I have lived with it in the Connecticut Department of Correction. This agency is part of who I am. And I believe with all I am that I can lead this Department to this future challenges and the evolutions that I know we can embark on.

Today, the Department of Correction is a midst of his first ever pandemic, a pandemic no correctional system in the world has ever dealt with. Since COVID struck our state 10 months ago, our staff have worked tirelessly to minimize exposures to the offender population and to our employees to provide medical support for those that are asymptomatic, and to release as many incarcerated individuals that are eligible who can safely return to the community in an effort to expand social distances in our facility.

Last month, the prison policy initiative reported Connecticut Department of Correction had the largest inmate population reduction of the 21 states, which have readily available data. Our staff did this by being smart, dedicated, committed, hardworking and releasing those individuals in our custody was sustainable re-entry plan. We work with the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, to ensure that housing of these entering the community and upper road division work with these individuals to avoid needless return to Department of Corrections custody. I cannot explain to you today how proud I am of the efforts of the men and the women of the

Department of Correction do one of the most difficult times.

So what's in for the future for the Department? Once our staff and incarcerated population received the COVID vaccination in the very near future, the pandemic is under control. I will be rolling out many changes to build on our previous administration in advance our agency. First, due to the dramatic reduction of individuals under our custody, it is my obligation to identify corresponding cost-savings option. I intend to implement one or more facility closures to correspond with the reduction in population. This would have occurred sooner. But with our efforts to ensure safety and mitigate the spread of COVID among our correctional population, and our staff complement, we require that we utilize the facilities to progress must social distancing our population as possible.

Second, I will be reforming and enhancing our restrictive status program to reduce unnecessary restrictions, while providing more rehabilitative program in a manner that continues to prioritize the safety and security of our staff incarcerated and incarcerated population.

Third, I will be partnering with the sister agency to identify implement, enhance educational and workforce training opportunities for our population, while actively engaging business and local communities to provide more employment opportunities for returning citizens. As I have learned from my own upbringing, the importance of a hope -- holistical community engagement and individual success.

Lastly, as I plan to continue developing the technology within our correctional facility, we've already seen benefit that these investment yield to recent launch of our video visitation and tablet program over the last few months. But I want to use

the momentum that we have realized through these launches to expand and provide additional opportunities for our population. And the more than 50 years history of Department of Corrections, I believe, this is one of the most exciting, dynamic times, and I am looking forward to and more than prepare for this challenge opportunity.

Before I end my statement yesterday, our Correctional Officers Union had a press release on their concern and their frustration where our staff members now receiving their vaccination. I'm here to report that starting Monday, February 1st, we will start vaccinating our staff members in the group 1B. We've partnered up with a Griffin hospital. We've kind of collaborated with D.P. -- DPH Controller's Office and with the great leadership of governor Lamont; he's allowed me to be on the forefront of organizing the rollout of a vaccination.

So starting Monday, at seven correctional facilities, our staff and group 1B will be receiving their vaccination. In addition to a Monday, we've identified the 75 offenders under -- individuals under my custody that are 75 and older. There's 27 individuals, and we will be vaccinated them starting on Monday in -- so I thank the Committee for this time to share my background, experience and vision for the Department. And I will be happy now to answer any questions.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Thank you, Commissioner. Appreciate it. And thanks for that update. Can you -- I have some other questions. But since you raised that Monday in February, which I think is coming up. Can you explain that all your staff are just -- what age group of staff?

ANGEL QUIROS: That'd all our staff; there'll be submitted 5,400 of our staff members that qualify for that group 1B. We've done a survey of our staff out of the 5,400 staff members. 4,300 of our staff

have participated in the survey, 1,962 have indicated that they will take the vaccination, 100 - 6,094 have indicated they will not take the vaccination. and 663 of our staff members are undecided at this time.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Okay, so the ones who want to take the vaccination will get the vaccination?

ANGEL QUIROS: Correct, Senator.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): On that -- on that one day?

ANGEL QUIROS: No this will be on -- start February 1st on Monday and it will go into February 22nd of February. We'll run Monday to Friday this week with several clinics that will be administered by Griffin Hospital the first week, then moving on to the second week on seven different facilities. So our staff will have probably an opportunity -- probably about three weeks to be vaccinated for that first doses. At the same time that will we be doing the second dose for our health service staff who were in the group 1A.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Okay. Is there a policy for anybody who does not want to take the vaccination as to how you will sign them or not?

ANGEL QUIROS: No, there's no policy. They cannot be forced to take the vaccination. So we were -- it the -- we're educating -- sending out educational material. And, hopefully, we want to get to a higher percentage. Right now, as I'm looking at [inaudible], we have a potential that -- and probably around low 60 in compliance on break for the vaccination. And we want that percentage higher.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Thank you. Is -- most of the - - I would assume the infections coming from the officers into the -- into the prisons? Would that be correct? That's where you get your infections

from or staff obviously coming into the -- because you don't have any visitors right now. Is that correct?

ANGEL QUIROS: Correct, sir. The main introduction of the COVID-19 is our staff because they're coming in out and going back into the communities. However, we have four county jails, five with the females, that individuals of new intakes are coming in, come bring that virus into the -- into our correctional facility.

We have stopped social visits -- people from coming in. In March, early October, we commence with no contact visits on a smaller amount of citizens coming into our correctional facilities. But once the facility goes into an operational phase plan three, then every visitor staff from coming in vendors and so forth.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Okay, thank you. I just want -- that I just want -- since you mentioned I wanted to put those on a record, and I'm sure there'll be other questions on that as well with other Committee Members. I just want to get to some questions I had prepared earlier. I appreciate the time we spent together prior to this public meeting. I want to ask you, is it -- is it the case that we have about 5,000 fewer prisoners since the last prison closed in 1998?

ANGEL QUIROS: I want to say --

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): I'm sorry, 2000 -- was it 2008 or something like that? That's a long time ago.

ANGEL QUIROS: And the last facility that close was Enfield Correctional Institution up in the Enfield. And that was -- I want to say that was in 2018 -- April 1st of 2018. So, yes; population has dropped close to 5,000 sentence.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Okay. Yeah, sorry about that. I didn't know why I said, 98 -- 2018, I meant. And you've had -- so you have 5,000 of your prisoners, but about 3,000 of that 5,000 has been since COVID. Is that correct?

ANGEL QUIROS: Correct. We've had from March 1st to current or close to 3,300 offenders.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Right. Okay. And I know you talked a little bit about it in your testimony about saving resources and maybe closing additional prisons. Can you talk a little bit about that and your plans in the future? Obviously, we understand with COVID you're trying to spread people out. And that is the right policy once vaccinations are commonplace in the state, and especially not only with corrections officers, but with inmates. What is your plan after COVID to close more prisons?

ANGEL QUIROS: Yeah, once the vaccinations -- our staff has been vaccinated and our individuals have been vaccinated, we've been preparing now for several years. I've met with our correctional unions, leaders and was transparent about facility closures. I plan on closing two correctional facilities for this budget year, F.Y. 2021. Facility closures are very difficult, because you're taking staff members and moving them out of their work location by seniority basis. And some may end up on traveling further to the work site. Some may end up on a -- on a -- on a different shift because of the facility going to -- based on the -- on this -- the seniority.

We've been preparing for this rollout with our first facility closure, which I plan to announce in the very near future. You know, and I'm listening to every -- just about everybody, from our unions, from our frontline staff, from the elected officials, from the advocacy groups of -- which correctional facilities are shut down. I've been on the record

before indicating that the only facilities that are not on the table for me to redo for shutdown are the three county jails -- Hartford, New Haven and Bridgeport and York because York is the only a female prison. So the other 10 correctional facilities are on under the review board for me to consider. And in the very near future, they will there will be announcements coming up.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Okay, what do you know when you anticipate that coming out at all?

ANGEL QUIROS: Let's say within the -- by mid-February.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Okay. And you anticipate two?

ANGEL QUIROS: For the -- yeah, for the budget year, F.Y. 2021, yes.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Okay. And then, any additional ones after that?

ANGEL QUIROS: It would -- that would depend based on what happens out in the community, if there's an uptick on arrests, if the pandemic is still not under control, and I need space for the social distances. In particular, the dorm setting -- on dorm setting has -- I need to space out those individuals and reduce the capacity by 50%. So I'm comfortable with the first two and F.Y. 2021 is going to depend what's going to happen with the COVID, is going to depend what's going to happen with this population and for this increase is going to depend on what happens out in the community if there's more. If our consensus population increases, then I need to have the space.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Okay, thank you. And you mentioned earlier, you have about a little over 5,000 employees. And that -- which is probably, unfortunately, one of our larger agencies, if not

our largest. Do you know how many are going to be retiring when we have the contract changes?

ANGEL QUIROS: Yes. We have close to over 6,000 state employee. That 5,400 number of the individuals that are eligible to be placed on the vaccination plan or 1B but our total staffing level is a little bit over 6,000. July 1st, 2022, I have, approximately, close to 1,000 employees that will have to make the decision if they're going to continue to be employee with the Department of Corrections or if they're going to retire so not to avoid the changes in their pension plan. The highest group of that 1,000 will be a close to 500 correctional officers that are eligible to retire July 1st 2022.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Okay, thank you. And do you know how many -- as my last question, do you know how many you might need to hire at that point, based on kind of your modeling that you're trying to do?

ANGEL QUIROS: But right now, in the past three years, we've had three academy classes go through an entire year. I believe that this this year for this budget year that I'm seeing, probably, one class, and that'd be probably late in the fall, early winter, sometime in October or November. So we usually operate three classes for the whole year. I'm only seeing one class, because I will be able to reallocate the resources of the closing facilities. The --

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Okay.

ANGEL QUIROS: Will be good.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Thank you. how many in class?

ANGEL QUIROS: Our class is average anywhere from 120 to 150.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Okay, thank you very much. Representative Gresko, do you have -- thank you, Commissioner. I appreciate the answers to the questions. Representative Gresko, do you have any questions?

REP. GRESKO (121ST): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Yes, I do. Mr. Quiros, thank you for being here today. And congratulations on your nomination by the Governor. But I just had a couple of questions. I understand that inmates who have tested positive for COVID are quarantined. But the Department of Corrections' personnel that are assigned to those individuals are cycled. Does that create an issue with exposure and contact tracing?

ANGEL QUIROS: It could, it could. So let me walk you through for an individual that is tested positive for symptomatic individuals may be showing high temperature or have a couple of the symptoms. Those individuals are moved to a medical isolation unit as Suffield. At the peak on December 22nd, we had like 280 symptomatic offenders at a McDougal. That unit originally was ran by the facility staff. And there was -- I have some concerns that -- I was -- I was having too many staff members being posted in those three housing units. And it was probably contributed to the spread. So the decision I made was bringing our correctional emergency response team. And I have probably about 50 staff members that are working those units and are now on the same staff members that are working that unit. They have a separate entrance, they have the proper PPE. So that -- that has reduced the spread at that facility.

Then you have -- on the other 13 correctional facilities, you got quarantine units for individuals that are asymptomatic. As of this morning, I had 182 asymptomatic individuals on my custody that I've been monitoring of quarantine units and 11 correctional facilities. And the award is -- we'll

attempt to make sure that just one group of individuals are assigned to that -- to their housing units. But you have to understand that it's three different shifts. So on one day, we may have probably six different staff members entering their housing unit -- work at housing unit, and we try our best to keep them there and not put them in anywhere else in the correctional facilities.

REP. GRESKO (121ST): Thank you. And my next question, you mentioned it in your statement, making the technology specifically tablets available to those that are under your custody so that they can email to their families to research further their education. But the state makes money off of that technology availability but it's for things that assist reintroduction. Is that correct?

ANGEL QUIROS: So right now currently -- so two things have happened. We got team visits. Team visits came on board, I want to say early October, and so we went out to our 14 correctional facilities, wired up and did the infrastructures and provided them with the -- with the laptops for the individuals to have teams visit. Team visits is free to the family members. There's no charge to the family members. Since October, we've had probably over 5,000 visits on teams and is a big -- issue -- it is a perfect tool to keep the offenders connected to the family members. The iMessaging is on the -- on the tablet. That started -- Department of Correction after having a meeting with the four judicial, Judicial Committee members, I decided -- so a stamp will cost, which is a tax will cost the offender 20 cents. And then, the family members that are replying back, that will be an additional 20 cents. A lot cheaper than stamp, a lot quicker. The Department of Corrections not taking any income based on that -- based on that.

Off the tab is -- the only income the vendors taking is those for games and movies. But I'm trying to

gear our agency that, as much as we can to get away from making a profit from the family members. To me, communication with the families of the loved ones is the most important, and it should be free or at a possible lowest cost as possible to the family members on the community.

REP. GRESKO (121ST): Thank you. And, Mr. Chair, my last question has to do with the recent Barnfield claim that the Legislature will be -- will be eventually voting on but come March of 2022 and the Hep-C testing stops, why March of 2022? Do you hope to have it eradicated by then or why was the day chosen?

ANGEL QUIROS: I am not sure why that date was chosen. But I can tell you that, as a Commissioner, my intention is to continue make it a priority that these individuals that we've identify that are -- that need to be in the Hep-C medication program that we deliver that, and we continue to provide the medical treatment. Our guidance -- our policy is -- mirrors exactly of the bureau prison system. And my attention is that come March of 2020 continue to provide that medical treatment and so forth to defend a population.

REP. GRESKO (121ST): Thank you, sir. And thank you, Mr. Chair. That's all the questions I had.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Great. Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman, Representative. Any other questions from Members of the Committee? Senator Looney? Take yourself off mute, Senator. Can't hear you yet, Marty.

SENATOR LOONEY (11TH): Hear me now?

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Yep.

SENATOR LOONEY (11TH): Okay, good. All right. Got me unmuted. All right. Good. Thanks. Commissioner, congratulations on your nomination.

ANGEL QUIROS: Thank you, sir.

SENATOR LOONEY (11TH): And appreciate the opportunity to speak with you in advance of this hearing. A couple of questions to follow up on the things that you said about the pre-trial detainees that's a particular concern, I think in terms of healthcare, because the sentence population, obviously, is carefully screened and monitored. But what are the COVID protections that are being applied to the pre-trial population?

ANGEL QUIROS: Yes, so our pre-trial population right now in the four county jails, we have over 3,000 male and over 229 female offenders that are on sentence. As I indicated earlier, individuals are coming out from the community and are being brought into the Department of Corrections with their quarantine for the first fifth -- 14 days. They're given a COVID test at the beginning of the entry; they're monitored by our health service staff, and offer any symptoms. And then at the -- on the 14th day they're tested again. And if they're not -- if they're negative, then they will move from the quarantine unit into a general population unit.

There's a mass testing that goes on weekly with the offender population. There's weekly testings that goes on with our correctional staff. Anytime individually in my custody is discharging -- going out to a hospital trip, transferring internally, three days prior, there's a COVID test, just to make sure that if you're -- if the individual is positive, that he or she does not move. And that's been a huge different from the first wave where back in March, the test kits were not as available as we are today. I can tell you that a week ago; we did --

close to 5,700 tests of the offender population in one week.

SENATOR LOONEY (11TH): Also on that, Commissioner, has there been any substantial change in the numbers of people in pre-trial detention today, as opposed to what it was last March at the beginning of the pandemic?

ANGEL QUIROS: It has slightly increased. I think, back in March, and probably more towards April, we probably hit on 2,700 on sentience. And now we're close to a little bit over 3,000. So I have seen an increase in the intake in the county jails. Yes.

SENATOR LOONEY (11TH): And is that primarily because of people unable to post bond?

ANGEL QUIROS: I wouldn't say that -- well, during the COVID-19 of one thing, with the Department of Corrections, there was strong -- definitely some collaboration with the front end of the system, with diversion of programming, with the Prosecutor's Office, with Judge Carroll and his staff, with CSSD, with the Public Defender's Office and reviewing cases at the front end, and making sure that the individuals that came to my front door at the Department of Correction was individuals that needed to be there, that if there was any opportunity for divert them, that, that diversion was made.

SENATOR LOONEY (11TH): Let's see. Is there -- is there less of that now going on?

ANGEL QUIROS: No, the collaboration is still there, on Public Defense Office still busy, the Prosecutor's Office is still busy. My communication with Judge Carroll, with CSSD is still there, in which we're always monitoring the front end, to make sure that minimize that number as much as possible.

SENATOR LOONEY (11TH): You mentioned that there is a -- we expecting a couple of new classes of 120 to 250 per class. What's the -- what's the starting salary now for a correction Officer?

ANGEL QUIROS: While they're in academy, I believe is a, I believe is like \$41,000 dollars when they're in academy, and then after once they graduate. And as a slight increase, I want to say anywhere between \$44,000 dollars, \$45,000 dollars after they've graduated.

SENATOR LOONEY (11TH): I see when they first come out on the job. Thanks. Also one of the big concerns. I know in terms of eligibility for early release, is the issue of a finding suitable placement. For people there are -- there regulations about what -- the nature of the setting or living arrangements for people who are going to be released on early release programs around probation.

As sometimes there are circumstances that come up -- I think I mentioned to you when we were speaking that I had -- a number of years ago, a client of mine was someone who had been an exemplary prisoner, had undertaken -- participate in completed a lot of programs that were offered to him, and was being considered for early release. And his mother and older brother, who were -- that owned a home together and lived in the community in a stable way were willing to take him in. The problem was that each of them at a felony conviction years ago. In the mother's case, it had been, I think, 20 years earlier, and the older brother's case 10 years earlier. And there was a problem getting him released into that settings because of the strictness of the rule about not associating with anyone with a prior record.

But in this case, they were -- by this time upstanding citizens, but they had these convictions in their past. How do -- how do you evaluate that?

I mean, do you take a case by case approach? Or do you apply some flexibility in circumstances like that, in terms of making a judgement about appropriate people for a release, see to associate with or live with?

ANGEL QUIROS: That's a great question, Senator Looney. As I indicated prior, I have first-hand experience with family members that have done lengthy time in the correctional settings and have unchanged and come out to be great citizens, taxpayers. As a Commissioner, I have -- I need to have that flexibility to make sure that this is case by case. And in that case that you indicated and we talked previously, that is great. That's a perfect case where I want to send that individual out into their families. To meet a family support is key and making sure that individual is successful.

To me, that brother who was incarcerated, and it's been now for 10 years. And as a law-abiding citizen paying taxes, I want that brother to be around that individuals coming out that -- provide individual hope. So if -- I will take a case by case and I will be flexible with the requirements and getting these individuals back to their loved ones and back out into the community so they can be successful.

SENATOR LOONEY (11TH): Great that -- thank you. And you mentioned in terms of community connection, I know that many studies have shown that the prospects for released prisoners or the reentry population to be successful and not fall back into their prior behavior when they come back, in many cases is directly related to the quality of their -- of their contacts with their family and their community while they were incarcerated and to avoid a situation of alienation, loneliness and isolation when they come out.

And one of the keys to that, I know over the past one of things has been controversial, is the cost of

telephone conversations between inmates and their family. And that that was being used, in many ways, as a -- as a profit center, you know, for corrections, and that the cost that -- for those, in effect, collect calls that the families in the community would have to bear, or -- were extreme. I know there's legislation that this time this year that would end that practice. And I know there's all -- it's also the case, as you know, that most of the inmates come from the larger cities to -- in the state from New Haven, Hartford, Bridgeport, Waterbury, New Britain, for instance, but yet they are located in some of the more remote areas of the state far away from their home.

So the issue is a cost in order to -- and most of the time, they do come from low-income families. So it is often a burden to sustain regular telephone contact with the rates as high as they have been, and the cost being a profit center for the department. Just the -- your thoughts on that process.

ANGEL QUIROS: So let me be clear for individual under my cost to be successful, it is key that connection, while they're incarcerated with the loved ones. I will be an advocate of -- to make sure that the pricing on the inmate full system is reduced. If we can get to zero, that'll be great, with the understanding that even if it gets to zero, there's going to be a cost for those phone calls to the Department of Correction and becomes a budget -- a budget issue of where the -- how we're going to pay for it. So I'm going to be a strong advocate that prices should be reduced because of our family connection to me on its price list and making sure that their loved one is connected to family members, providing them with the best opportunity.

And, again, for first-hand -- first-hand experience, I can tell you that that family contact with my family, and those offenders were key, so making sure

that you provide them with the support they needed to come out. Because it's going to be very difficult. And they're coming out now, during the pandemic, where employment rate is higher. You know, so it's even more important for us -- for me, as a Commissioner, make sure that that communication is as low as possible. And if it's free is even better.

SENATOR LOONEY (11TH): Right, good. Thank you. What -- Commissioner, do you have a sense of how many people in the system right now in a sentence population are they're serving a -- their original sentence? Or how many people are they're in right now who are in their -- on a charge of violation of parole or violation of probation, as opposed to the original charge under which they came into the system?

ANGEL QUIROS: I don't want to have this exact number. But I can tell you that this question came up before, and that my recollection is clear. I think there were -- in the categories, they were -- they rated number five, meaning that I've had more individuals coming in. The number one charge coming in was murder since COVID. And then VOPP, Violation of Probation -- Program Probation was ranked number five. But I can get you this numbers; I can tell you that as significantly has decreased. And we've brought individuals back into custody, and within weeks, send them right back out. So it has decreased but I can get you the exact numbers.

SENATOR LOONEY (11TH): Right. Yeah, that -- and, of course, that -- that's very sound -- the two categories, also there are some violators who come back because they have committed a new crime. And that new crime is both a crime in itself and also constitutes a violation of their probation or parole. But what I'm wondering about was how many people are there incarcerated, who is -- who were there on a violation charge for something that was not in itself, that would not be regarded as a

crime, that if it were committed by somebody who was not under that sentence, but a technical violation of their parole, someone who is there because they, say, failed a drug test or missed a probation appointment or failed to check in or failed on one of the conditions of probation or parole, rather than something that would be a clear violation like a new crime would be.

ANGEL QUIROS: To me, so maybe very clear that those numbers are very low. And I will get you a number, Senator. We do not by late in a -- during COVID pandemic. We learned that they did not violate an individual for missing a curfew one time, two times, probably three times. There were multiple cases that occur multiple on during the years that occur before we brought the individual. And our plan was to work with the individual, guide them, redirect them.

SENATOR LOONEY (11TH): Right.

ANGEL QUIROS: And try to keep him on the community. But I will definitely get those numbers up for you.

SENATOR LOONEY (11TH): Good. Well, I appreciate that, Commissioner, thank you very much. And congratulations on the distinguished career you've had in the department up to this time, holding every rank all the way up. And I look forward to your tenure as Commissioner.

ANGEL QUIROS: Thank you, Senator Looney.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Thank you, Senator. Any other questions from Members of the Committee? Senator Somers, followed by Rep. Vargas.

SENATOR SOMERS (18TH): Yes. Congratulations, Commissioner, on your new role. And I just had a few questions concerning health care. Do -- you've had a lot of questions concerning COVID. But the Public Health Committee is concerned about the health care

of inmates in general. And we would love the opportunity to sit down with you and the DPH Commissioner, and talk about some of the things that have come to us and wanted to see if you were open to that, and suggestions that we have that could, perhaps, improve the health care that our prisoners or inmates are receiving in a -- as far as the delivery and the ratio of staff and, you know, this is beyond COVID, in addition to COVID.

You know, we're very concerned about the ratio of the social workers and mental health availability for our inmates, and, in general, their healthcare in general. You know, the -- we've made some changes over the few years, from, obviously, going from UConn health delivering it to have it, you know, directed under the DOC. But there's still some areas of concern for us.

And we also, in Public Health, have questions on, for example, a Bill that we have looked at, talks about how; believe it or not, dogs can detect COVID with 99% accuracy through their scent. And that's something that we'd like to work with you on to see if that is a program that we could connect our inmates to help them, perhaps, train dogs that can actually smell COVID. It's a great way to, you know; use them in large venues, as a screening process. It's been very successful, and other countries and a few states are now picking it up. So we'd love an opportunity to see if you are open to those sorts of ideas going forward.

ANGEL QUIROS: Senator Somers, absolutely. I'm available to meet. I will show you that before I made a decision take on this job as a nominee for Commissioner, my top priority needed to be the healthcare service that was being deliver to the population that I am responsible for. I've been here since 1989. So I was here with Department of Corrections around medical, I was here for -- when UConn came in, and then I was here for when we soak

-- them back under our supervision. I will tell you that I've seen some great improvements. I will also tell you there's a lot of room for improvement in the system. And I will be at the table with anybody that's going to help us improve the delivery of care to the individuals that they need to be the same standard of care out in the community.

As far as the dog, man he -- were using it last week -- dogs to sniff of the fans coming in for COVID-19. So we do have two programs where we train dogs for the vets and we also train Greyhound dogs to get them accustomed to a once they get the racing track to go back to be adopted. I'll be more than happy to start up the program, where we're going to have a dogs detecting COVID-19. I think will be beneficial for the staff, as well as the population. That is one -- I can tell you when you walk the facilities that has the canines in it that we have, you can see that it makes a difference.

SENATOR SOMERS (18TH): It does. So I'm excited about that. So thank you for answering those questions. And I look forward to having you meet with our Committee and talk about the dog program at a later time. And congratulations.

ANGEL QUIROS: Thank you, Senator Somers.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Thank you, Senator Representative Vargas.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I would be remiss, as a representative of the South Hartford, part of the great city -- capital city of Hartford if I didn't speak up today at this -- at this hearing.

First of all, our Commissioner Designee Angel Quiros, I want to congratulate you on being appointed Commissioner of Department of Corrections by Governor Ned Lamont. I think it's a wonderful

day. I just -- I also wanted to weigh in on, on some of these issues. I wanted to let you know that I strongly support the idea of making phone calls more accessible to family members. And it makes it -- if that requires an allocation of funds, I'm willing to support that. I'm sure that many of our colleagues here at the Legislature are willing to support that, but we have to make those phone calls accessible.

I also am a strong supporter of reforming the medical treatment for inmates, making sure that they get quality health care, while they were incarcerated. And on a personal note, you know that I know your family well for many decades. They've contributed much to the City of Hartford, and we're very proud of them. And I'm very proud of you coming up the ranks of the Department of Corrections, and making your way up to the top position within that Department.

And as a proud Latino and specifically as a proud Puerto Rican, which we both are, it's an important day for all of us to know that in this day and age, we have one of our own, in such a key position, not only from the City of Hartford, from our own ethnic group, which as you know has been under represented for many, many years. And we've -- it's been a struggle to have the kind of role models that our kids need in our community to look up to. So I congratulate you. And I wish you great success in your tenure as the Commissioner of DOC. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

ANGEL QUIROS: Representative Vargas, thank you very much. And thank you for your continued support.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Thank you, Representative. Any other questions from Members of the Committee at all? Do I see Senator Moore with her hand on the button at all? Or no?

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): Yeah [inaudible], so good morning.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Say that again?

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): Yeah.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Good morning, Senator Moore.

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): Good morning. I had the pleasure of listening to you last night with the Black and Puerto Rican caucus. So I heard a lot about who you are. I really do want to congratulate you. I heard what Representative Vargas said. It's really important for us and our children and for -- just the community say that, you know, you work hard. You worked hard, you work your way up. You have a good idea and understanding of what is happening in the criminal justice system and incarceration. I appreciate that, that you're there, that you've seen so much you understand the changes that need to be made. I had a question regarding the COVID vaccines. It seemed like there was a high percentage of people who have chosen not to get the vaccine. I was wondering do you know by facility, what are the highest percentages of who has decided not to get the vaccine?

ANGEL QUIROS: Yeah, I have those numbers right now. I'm just looking through my paperwork. If you want I can walk you through it individually.

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): I don't think though. Are there two -- what are the two highest?

ANGEL QUIROS: Two highest right now will be Chester C.I. They have 168 that will take it, 155 that said no, 76 that are undecided. [Exise] will be McDougal Walker, 225 indicated they will take it, 224 indicated will not take it 135 indicate that they will -- they're undecided. I think there's one more here.

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): So you may have some places that over 50% of the staff will not be vaccinated?

ANGEL QUIROS: Correct.

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): So, going forward, once this -- all of the vaccinations take place, do you have a plan on how you might address that? I know it's -- the vaccination is not mandatory. But if you don't have a plan, will you be thinking about what your plan will be when you see the numbers rise and the facilities where over 50% are not getting the vaccination. I don't know if that's enough for herd immunity. But I think it's something that you should keep an eye on.

ANGEL QUIROS: Absolutely, is not enough. Our biggest piece is going to be not the education -- going back into the education; our biggest piece now is going to be for those individuals that said no to see the other 50% of their peers that are taking it and with no side effects and coming to work. And there is a big educational piece, Senator Moore, to -- for the offender population. Because we average, probably, in a flu season, probably 35% of our offender population will take the flu shot.

So we've been very busy the last two weeks, educating, not just our staff, but also the population on the importance of taking this vaccination so that we can minimize the spread of the COVID-19. And I would say that the last two weeks, our numbers, when it comes to COVID-19 are significantly dropping, where this morning, I only have 65 offenders in the medical isolation unit with symptoms. Back in December, who are up to 280. But education is going to be a big piece getting out there. And then the other big piece that I'm banking on is those undecided individuals, when they start seeing those clinics up in their correctional facilities and they start seeing those other -- of

staff members and peers taking the shot that they'll say, "You know what, I'm going to be smart, I'm going to take the shot and play."

And then -- from that point on, I'm going to be monitoring daily the percentage of our staff and our offender population, and then continue to monitor every single day. I can tell you, Senator Moore, that this is a seven-day -- seven days a week job, 12, 16 hours just monitoring every single case of COVID-19 for me.

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): I -- my final question is -- thank you for that. But do you have an education program that's specific for your population to encourage them to get the vaccination and help them understand what's happening with the vaccination? Or is it --

ANGEL QUIROS: Yes, we are -- our information -- the educational information we receive is the information from CDC. That information, copies are made copies are given to the offender populations, somewhat town halls, because you got to be careful with the number of offenders that we've been together. But the educational piece, a lot of it is face to face with our medical personnel going into those housing units, and answering the questions of that the offender may have about the vaccination, and it's just going to be continuing that cycle of the educational piece in the face to face where they have an opportunity to ask the question. To me that's the most beneficial that may have an individual change their mind from a no to a yes.

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): Okay, I said that was my final but it's not really, just this is my final. How do you educate the incarcerated people when they can't come together? What type of communication are you using to reach them?

ANGEL QUIROS: Well, they are coming to -- they are coming together some facilities, if so we did for a COVID-19. And I want to make this answer complicated. But operational plan, if a facility did not have large numbers of COVID-19, that will be in a phase one operational plan, meaning that movement within that facility, there will still be school call, there will still be work hard, there will still be medical call and the offenders will be able to move around the facility. If a facility gets placed in phase three of an operational plan, that's a -- that's a lockdown. That means that the case is a resume for us, like how in the community that we need to minimize the movement.

And that case, when a facility is on a phase three, a lot of the education to the population is one on one with their health service staff and the educational staff at the cell or when they come out in the -- in the recreation area with small numbers. And that -- that's the educational piece. Right now, I only have two correctional facilities that are on a phase three, the rest are on phase one. And Cheshire's on phase two, so there's a lot of movement still that is happening in the -- in the facility that makes it easier for the educational piece to happen.

SENATOR MOORE (22ND): Thank you, and congratulations.

ANGEL QUIROS: Thank you, Senator Moore.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Thank you. I want to call on Representative Kennedy next. And ever -- just a question in between that, but I apologize to her if she's been raising her hand, and I'm not seeing it. And it's -- the screens are moving around. And I -- sorry, I'm sorry if you were looking to question and I missed you before. Commissioner, just following up on Senator Moore's question about the -- in what you said to me earlier, with regard to only about 50% of

the -- of the correction officers or staff looking to get their vaccination. We've heard from medical experts that it's -- herd immunity should be somewhere between 70% to 85%. If you're only -- you know, hopefully, that through education, you can make that number go up to the correct number.

But I would ask that, if that does not happen that you circle back with Members of the -- of the Legislature, maybe even this Committee or others, the relevant Committees, with regard to a plan as to how you will address that if you do not get to the recommended herd immunity number, because if only 50% of the -- 50% of the members of your staff are getting vaccinated, what's the point if that's not creating herd immunity? And we need to make sure that we're keeping everybody safe all the way -- all the way around. Is there a -- also is there a mask policy that is for us -- corrections officers and other staff in the prisons?

ANGEL QUIROS: Yes, there's an executive order mandating the mask on our staff and the offender population. And that made it mandatory as part of their uniform for our -- for our frontline staff members.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Right. And as that you have good compliance?

ANGEL QUIROS: Just like out in the community, sometimes you got to reinforce the mask wearing. I will tell you that, probably, in July and August similar to the community, there was mask fatigue, there was COVID fatigue, not just be our staff, but also the population when I was walking into these facilities, and I was seeing that a -- the majority of our staff and the offenders were compliant with the mask but there was situations where I walk into a facilities that we had addressed both staff and the population under our custody. And it was similar to what we're seeing in the community.

And as simply as a supervisor as they're touring -- in the waters, as they're touring the facility to make sure that the minute that we see it, constant reminders -- constant reminders, a memorandum from my office as a Commissioner statewide to the -- to the facilities for roll call notice, reminding them the importance of wearing mask, and just addressing it as day to day, minute to minute.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Thank you. Okay, Representative Kennedy, I apologize, and thank you. Sometimes -- hold up your hand so I can at least see them here. If maybe you weren't -- I just didn't see it. I apologize, but thank you. Okay.

REP. KENNEDY (119TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair. I apologize. Appreciate it. Just a Commissioner Quiros, thank you so much. We did speak last week, but just following up on Chairman Duff's last comment; I do appreciate your diligence in making sure that your staff is wearing masks, as it does help. I want to applaud you on your look -- lengthy -- and I'm sorry -- very lengthy and decorated career, and thank you so much for everything that you've done as Commissioner for the State of Connecticut. My question is regarding the iMessaging on the tablets. Is that -- is the iMessaging you'd mentioned movies and books, possibly, do they also communicate did you say with their families as well with the iMessaging?

ANGEL QUIROS: Yes. So the pads -- the iPads that the offender population will be receiving right now, we have about 1,500 in McDougal, and we're working through the kinks to make sure that we fix them up before we roll out to the other facilities. So there's -- iMessaging system on it.

So the offender will pay 20 cents, they call it a stamp. So that 20 cents will allow the individual to send out a message to a loved one, a family member,

a friend, somebody out in the community, up to 6,000 characters. That'll go into a -- into the system. It will be review, to make sure that there's no violence or anything that is a -- could be criminal intent.

Once that message is clear, the family member will receive the message, loved one will receive the message. Once the loved one in the community received the message, there will be an account they set up with the vendor. The vendor will charge them 20 cents -- 20 cents to send a message back to the individuals under my custody. The family members are allowed up to 20,000 characters, which is around out three pages, handwritten on to respond back to the population.

It's going to be quicker for them to communicate, is going to be cheaper for them. I think a stamp right now cost 55 cents out in the community, and then you have to buy the envelope and send it in. And then it may take three, five, six, seven days for that communication to exchange. The exchange will be a lot quicker and a lot cheaper. And, again, the Department of correction is not taking any profit off that iMessaging system.

REP. KENNEDY (119TH): Thank you, Commissioner. I appreciate that clarification. And then going back to -- we did have that length -- lengthy discussion. I think my first year in session regarding the cell phones. Can you just elaborate on the costs of the cell phones? I know there's legislation this year, and I appreciate the new information and knowledge that I now have from listening to you. But can you just provide some additional information on that for me, as a cost and is every inmate -- ever -- will everyone be given a cell phone or it's just use of certain number of cell phones? Is it -- -- what's the process?

ANGEL QUIROS: It is -- there's no cell phones being issued out to the offender population. These are phones that are installed by the vendor inside of the housing units. Housing units has probably anywhere from five to seven telephone lines that the individuals are able to contact their family members. Their allow up to three -- five calls a day, for 15 minutes each time. A 15-minute call could cause a family member, I believe -- I believe are close to \$15 dollars a charge.

There have been -- I've met with many elected official last year. I've been in conversation with a representative so far this year to introduce a Bill to reduce that cost -- so zero to the family members. So there is a portion that comes back from the phone costs \$250,000 dollars comes back to the Department of Corrections and turn that money -- turns around and we were able to provide some programs to the offender population. And there's a larger amount that that comes back to the state that assists CSSD with the salaries of their probation officers. And then it's a portion that assist the state with the informational system. I don't have those exact numbers. But there are millions.

REP. KENNEDY (119TH): Thank you very much. And that's pretty much it. And I just want to wrap up by just saying that I do applaud your efforts on the education piece regarding the vaccinations. That is very important, you know, being -- and having the knowledge is the most important thing going forward. And I do hope that some of the -- over 1,000 people that you mentioned do decide to take advantage of the vaccinations on. But, again, sir, thank you very much for your distinguished and lengthy career to the State of Connecticut and look forward to working with you in the future. Congratulations, sir. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Thank you, Representative.
Representative Yaccarino, followed by Senator

Formica. And is there anybody else before -- Representative Quinn, did you have your hand up or Senator Somers again? Okay.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Thank you, Commissioner. This is Representative Yaccarino from Northaven.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Might want to put your screen down a little bit, Dave. There we go.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): There I can see a little bit. Thank you, Mr. Chair and thank you, Commissioner. Congratulations also. I can't see the Commissioner at all, but I can only see you about Senator Duff. So as far as education, we've discussed quite a bit on the vaccine, which I think is a part. But a U.S. Commissioner, what is your vision for education actually for inmates to, hopefully, get an education through the trades, or in education -- have some hope and stability, so they -- when they do get out, they have opportunity and, again, you know, civilian life.

ANGEL QUIROS: Absolutely. That's a very important topic. So, we have -- what we have done during the COVID pandemic, when I talked about going into the 14 correctional facilities and wiring the infrastructures. For example, we were able to do virtual learning with the individuals that are participating into Pell Grants. And I want to say, probably, since October, there's probably four community colleges that are continuing with the Pell Grant Program in our population, which is a very important program, that our population takes advantage of that.

We also went into MYI and equipped MYI in the process with WiFi, so that population -- the youth population has an opportunity that whenever we go into lockdown status that the teachers are still able to do further -- teaching to the students in

their cells. They have a -- right now, have 220 individuals in MYI. They all have the Chromebooks on -- for them.

So my vision for the Department of Corrections similar to Michigan State. They have the villages, where there were able to bring the manufacturing piece inside of a correctional facility. If you remember back in April -- March of 2019, I had close to 26 individuals attending Asnuntuck Community College the manufacturing program. And, unfortunately, we have one individual decided he was going to walk away on a Saturday. And what happened was with the program and the getting cancelled, based on one incident, so I want to bring that program inside of correctional facilities.

So when the hands on and the machines are done inside of correctional facilities, we don't have to wait for about safety, security. And they continue to partnership. Before COVID, I had eight individuals working in -- wood craft on second shift so our staff -- and would drop them off on second shift to wood craft and ask for Connecticut and them pick them up at midnight.

And these individuals when they were discharging and wood craft was hiring them, they had entry level jobs, making up to \$50,000 dollars. Those are the kind of program educational skill set that I want to bring to the Department of Corrections, because the most important things for an individual be successful is having a home, a family support. And then that job.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): I agree.

ANGEL QUIROS: Yeah.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): It's hope and having that opportunity. So speaking of home, I heard -- you mentioned Connecticut Coalition and the Home --

Homelessness, I do work with them on occasion. And I'm really glad that you do that. What is your -- what's the Department of Correction's role with them? I think it's important, because if you go to the point you go out in the middle of the night, people are homeless, and you ask them, "Why are you here? Why are you here go to a warming center?" They don't have a job. They are -- they have other issues, obviously, unfortunately. But what is your correlation and connection? And what do you do -- what do you do further as a Commissioner? Not just in Hartford area, but it's the whole state.

ANGEL QUIROS: So that they were critical. They played a critical role in March and early April, when COVID really hit hard in that first wave. In the month of April, we have 60 individuals that had nowhere to go. And working with the -- with the coalition. I mean, we work with them on first shift, second shift, Saturdays, Sundays, no matter what time of the hour, and we were able -- we're working with the coalition to place all 60 individuals into a -- into a home.

You know, we drove them -- our staff drove these individuals to hotels when they discharged. And some individuals, we stopped at CVS and made sure that we picked up their medication for two weeks. And so, now we're able to find them a place to stay -- those 60 individuals, we drove them. And then we made sure we stopped the CVS to get the medication they needed, so that was not a problem. We -- my job is to continue working with them. And they're --

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Right.

ANGEL QUIROS: They're very critical, not just because of the COVID, but from this point going on to make sure that we minimize the individuals that are going into the community and they have somewhere to put the head on at night and sleep. That's one less thing they're gonna have to worry about.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Thank you. Two more questions, and I really appreciate your answers. And I think you're gonna do a great, great job. And I hope you do and I believe you will. So what -- I speak to quite a few. They're retired now, former correction employees. And their biggest complaint to me many times was they either in the education fields in the DOC or just, you know, correction officers, and governors from both Democrat Republican would appoint -- let her have political appointees. And they -- it really hurt them around some cases, because these folks are coming in, making more money than the rank and file. Is that still the case? I haven't spoken any of these folks about four or five years. But they were always concerned that people would be hired by the DOC. Maybe you don't know about it yet. You might see it as your Commissioner. But they really didn't have any expertise. But they just were put there by either a Democrat or Republican Governor. Have you heard of any of these cases? Because they've complained to me.

ANGEL QUIROS: I'm trying to follow the --

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): [crosstalk] appointed to position that really has no expertise in the Department of Correction. But they were just -- I don't know, the actual political appointees --

ANGEL QUIROS: Yeah.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Basically, in a sense, that's what they were saying to me.

ANGEL QUIROS: Yeah.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): So wanted you to teach there, and somebody would be hired, and they had no business being in there as a manager, or one of her bosses.

ANGEL QUIROS: Gotcha. So the only political appointment right now to the --

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Not you. I don't mean you, sir.

ANGEL QUIROS: Me --

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): You're correct.

ANGEL QUIROS: Yeah. All my -- all my promotions, internal and appointments --

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Right.

ANGEL QUIROS: have been done from within the Department of Correction. Those individuals that have worked in those facilities, those individually, they have the experience and knowledge of a correctional facilities.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Good. And one last question. So what do -- what do you see the biggest challenges? I mean, I think the education piece is -- it critical for people to have a hope -- have hope rather. In knowledge, do you see what are your challenges going forward, that maybe the Legislature can help with you, working together or just as a state as far as your role?

ANGEL QUIROS: Yeah. I -- I mean this job as a Commissioner is a -- it's probably -- it's probably one of the most difficult jobs there is in state agency. There will be many challenges. I don't think there's one challenge that's gonna be -- that's gonna be solved. The problem for the -- my job to get easier, I think that I need to come in to this with being open minded, understanding that I have to listen to the staff.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Good.

ANGEL QUIROS: Listen to the elected official, listen to the media, listen to the unions, listen to the advocacy group. No matter how difficult that conversation may be, I need to be at the table and listen to that conversation. And making changes that are going to be a -- that are going to be in sync'd, where we want of how to reform the department, but one that is done safely with our staff in mind and one that's done safely for the offenders returning back to community.

My wish would be that the collaboration that I've seen during this COVID-19 pandemic, when everybody, all state agencies, the non-profit vendors, the individual and the community will continue -- to continue to work together, continue to work with the Department of Corrections to make these individuals be successful when they go back out into the community. The business partners, you know, taking that risk with the individual.

On behalf of a felony conviction, do you know how difficult it is for an individual to get a good paying job with a felony conviction? That is difficult, but I need those --

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Yeah.

ANGEL QUIROS: To take a chance on these individuals, you know, and, help them -- help them. They're not going to be perfect; you know? They're going to fall, you know? Be there to pick them back up as a community and continue with the collaboration so that I, as a Commissioner, could continue to reduce our budget and an opportunity for elected officials. We appropriate those funds into other social services that have -- that have benefited community.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): I think you have the -- great attitude and, obviously, a great experience.

And I think you're going to take that forward in our state. And that it's such a critical role. And you'd -- you said I think you hit it right in the head. You know, people need opportunity, they need a second chance, as long as they're willing to work and get an education and have the community also accept them. That's the -- that's the hardest part is having people accept that may, "Hey, maybe he or she made a mistake." But they -- they've learned from that. And they want to be part of society. And that's the best solution. It's not perfect, but it's the best solution, I think, but I really appreciate your answers. I support you. I think you're gonna do well. And thank you too Committee Members and God bless.

ANGEL QUIROS: Thank you, Representative.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): Yeah.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Thank you, Representative. Okay. You can go back now to watching the Commissioner rather than me -- my face; I guess, it's a better view. Alright, next Senator Formica.

SENATOR FORMICA (20TH): Thank you. Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman. Thank you all very much. Commissioner, thank you for stepping up, and congratulations on this appointment. I just don't -- I just have a comment that I'd like to make. You've answered so eloquently all the questions that were put forward to you today. And it just is an indication of the command of the agency and of your position that you already possess. So I think the department is in great hands with you and coming up through the ranks, your practical experience. You know, I've been able to see firsthand is former first selectman working with you way back when. And, you know, my only regret today is that this is a House Resolution, and I'm not able to vote for it, you know, to move you forward, but any support that we can provide, I'm happy to do so. And, you know, I'm

so grateful for you for stepping up and the hard work you've put in, and congratulations to you on this -- on this promotion.

ANGEL QUIROS: Thank you, Senator.

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

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Thank you, Senator. Appreciate that. Senator Somers.

SENATOR SOMERS (18TH): Yes, one thing I forgot to mention. And it sparked my memory when you were being asked about the hesitancy on taking the vaccine. One thing that the Vaccine Taskforce Advisory Committee is doing, if this is helpful to you, we have been setting up forums across the State of Connecticut in different venues for different audiences, where we have the ability to have a scientific review member who reviewed all the data from the submission to the FDA, typically an M.D. or a PRN that has actually had the shots themselves, a communications member, and anyone else that you think would be appropriate, and they can come and we can do it Zoom -- through Zoom, where any of the folks whether they be inmates, and/or prisoners, or your staff have questions specifically about the vaccine, and we're seeing specific age groups have questions. They can get the answers directly from the experts in a very honest and frank way. So we were happy to set one up for you or two, if you need. And it has been extremely helpful in dispelling some of the false information about the vaccine that's out there.

And also, we've seen an uptick in the number of people willing to take the vaccine after they have an opportunity to join one of these forums. And it's a way to encourage folks to consider actually taking the vaccine. And we have seen folks, even in healthcare that were hesitant. They wanted to be second to get the vaccine, and now they've seen

their co-workers not have issues so they're willing to come on board. If that's something that would be helpful or you'd like to do, please feel free to reach out and we can set that up for you.

ANGEL QUIROS: Thank you, Senator Somers. Definitely, I have somebody taking no for me. So I will take you up on that. And you're right. I'm hoping that second -- those knows, as you're watching, they're encouraged by the reactions of the peers. And we get to their higher compliance number.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Thank you, Senator. I have Senator Looney next. Before he goes, is there anybody who else who would like ask questions? Just raise your hand if you don't mind? I don't -- Senator Hartley, did you have a question? I have Senator Looney on --

SENATOR HARTLEY (15TH): I --

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): So I want to make sure you're on the list if you want to be.

SENATOR HARTLEY (15TH): Yes, please, is --

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Okay. Great. Okay. Senator Looney, the floor is yours.

SENATOR LOONEY (11TH): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Just one additional question, Commissioner. A number of years ago, I had a conversation with one of your predecessors, Commissioner Teresa Lance, when she was going before the Committee, we were looking at the Department budget, and showed at the time that the amount for education programs for post-secondary education programs have been reduced substantially. And I asked her why that was. And she said, "Frankly, it's because we have so few people in the system that would be eligible to take those, and really the best that we can do, in many cases, is provide a GED for people in our system, because so

many people come into the prison system with less education than a high school diploma. And for the most part, the best that we can do is see that they acquire a GED while there, that they have so few that are educationally equipped to go beyond that." That your thoughts -- your thoughts on that. Is that still pretty much the same? Is there -- is that level of education deficit still pretty common in the M.A. population, so that in terms of preparation for future life, for most, a realistic goal is getting a GED, perhaps, and capacity to go beyond that is -- might take longer than their prison sentence in many cases?

ANGEL QUIROS: Sadly to report that when these individuals come into my custody, the majority of them their reading level and the math level is probably as low as a fourth grade level, so there's a lot of barriers for them to overcome with our school system. We mandate if they're under 21 years old, that they have to go into school, they cannot have a work assignment as a -- as a -- anywhere in the facility without obtaining that diploma. There still -- we still do issue out high school diplomas.

I think last week, I signed on three of them, but the majority of the individuals and my custody that go to school end up getting a GED. I can tell you that unified school district one with the -- with the teachers ties -- they were ties to try to get these individuals educated. We've seen that when they come in at a reading level of a fourth grade within like a two or three month period, just increase their reading level, probably to that of a -- an eighth grade, you know? So you do see the improvements daily and monthly and -- but we need to continue -- we need to continue with the -- with the funding of these school programs and provide them opportunities, so the individual can be successful, I mean when they come up.

SENATOR LOONEY (11TH): And then -- and you mentioned, there was the program you had that one of the community colleges, I believe, but that was more of a job training program, wasn't it, where you said, someone walked away and you wanted to bring that in-house instead for better security. But do you have many students now, who are doing a college level work? I know, there was the program with the -- with the Trinity College, bringing professors to work with inmates. Is that still continue or do you have anything that's post high school right now?

ANGEL QUIROS: Yes, we do. Yes, we do. That's a Western University.

SENATOR LOONEY (11TH): And other, yes. Yeah.

ANGEL QUIROS: Okay. Yale, and then we probably got another 600-plus individuals. They have taken advantage of the Pell Grants. And those are the individuals that I spoke about that in October, they started taking their classes virtually online with the professor. And that is a great program, the Pell Grant. And we're looking, hopefully, to increase those numbers.

SENATOR LOONEY (11TH): Right. And I know there was also a writing program, I believe, her college credit for the women inmates at York. I think that Mr. Lamb, I think, had run for a number of years and others, I think, that was -- there was also a college credit writing program, wasn't it?

ANGEL QUIROS: Yes. And that program -- that's Wally Lamb.

SENATOR LOONEY (11TH): Yes.

ANGEL QUIROS: That program came to an end probably about two years ago.

SENATOR LOONEY (11TH): Is there -- is there anything going on at York to replace that now?

ANGEL QUIROS: Yes, the offenders too, they do participate in the Pell program, and on college programs as well.

SENATOR LOONEY (11TH): Good, good. Well, thank you, Commissioner, and I look forward to your good work in the future in this critical job. Thank you, Senator.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Thanks, Senator Looney. Next, we have Sarah Hartley, followed by Senator Kelly, I believe, had a question as well.

SENATOR HARTLEY (15TH): Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Chair on -- and, Commissioner, I'm so excited to have you cope through this process and to get this -- to be official. You come to this position with an incredible wealth of experience, and know the Department intimately and the challenges. So talk about boots on the ground. I know you're ready to go.

I just wanted to, first of all, welcome you and then tell you that I'd like to reach out to you to sit down, to have maybe some uninterrupted time to ferret out this conversation about ex-offenders, end-of-termers and the transition into the work environment. You talked about the fact that, you know, it's home, it's family, and it's a job. I mean, I witnessed this every day in my community in Waterbury, with -- in the past, we've had, you know, our end-of-termers ending up, you know, down on Bennett Street, being discharged into the homeless shelter. And it's -- the programs we know that work the best are those that give those individuals credentials, at the time that they are re-entering the community. And we've had a very successful program in Waterbury, working with the manufacturing community. And I'm sure you're acquainted with it,

where they came on site, worked. And once again, you know, in the general population, we're talking about quick -- stackable credentials and short-term training programs. We're recognizing the value of those right now in this job environment where -- in particular in manufacturing, where there is this need for skilled workers, and then the rescaling and the upscaling.

So I just very briefly, I was wondering, you know, in the past, I have this conversation about many of the inmates work in electronics area, HVAC, those kinds of things. And so, they get credentials for certification for time worked in prison. But that credential shows as a DOC credential. And there was a conversation about trying to -- for example, if they were doing it for DEEP, you know, or they were doing it for, you know, another agency that they would get the credential from, and maybe DOL, which would, in some instances, blunt, some of -- you knew this characterization when they're going back into the job environment. Have we been able to do anything with that credentialing process?

ANGEL QUIROS: Yes, Senator. So I've been in contact, actually, in 2019 under Commissioner Cook, we partner up with the Department of Labor, and did exactly that. And, I believe, we have one program that is credential right now. And that are -- those are the individuals that are training, our canine, for the veterans, as an assist -- assistance dog. Those individuals -- once they have so many hours of training become certified canine trainers review that program and they're certified by the Department of Labor. We're looking at other programs like barbering on so many hours of barbering, and get those individuals with license to be a barber so when they -- when they come out into the community. So we will continue with the -- with the partnership with Department of Labor.

And if I may to, I just want to add one more. We talked about the four -- , I'll call them four elements for the individual to be successful -- family, a home, a job, of amaze -- the most important is that self-commitment of the individual to want to change, to want to go back out into the community, change their environment, change where they were hanging out, change who they're associating with, take that commitment -- that commitment, because I can have all the programs and re-entry packages to set him up for success. But if I don't have that self-commitment from the individual coming out, that individual's gonna be right back into the system.

SENATOR HARTLEY (15TH): Yeah, well said. And you mentioned the Michigan model a little bit earlier. And I think that -- that's, obviously, the gold standard. And right now, we have just had the benefit of the Governor's Workforce Strategy plan, which was issued. And we're just starting to digest that. One of the things that I was looking for in that plan, which I don't think is quite developed, at all, or sufficiently, is this segment of end-of-termers, those are returning to the population. So I have asked that group to circle back and to look into that, so that plan then represents this population as well. And so, when you talk about the Michigan model, I would like to introduce them to that, because I think that gives, you know, a real good model to aspire to. Thank you so much, Commissioner. Looking forward to working with you. Thank you, Mr. Chair.

ANGEL QUIROS: Thank you, Senator.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Thank you, Senator. Senator Kelly.

SENATOR KELLY (21ST): Thank you, Senator Duff. First, it's really more of a statement than questions. I'd like to congratulate you on your

appointment. It's clearly well-deserved after your long and distinguished service to the State of Connecticut, and to the populations that you serve. And what I find most striking here is your very practical approach and experience in dealing with this, which I think is a great approach is to not only have I'm going to say the textbook approach, but also understanding the practical human aspect. And the ability to listen. I think that was one thing that I heard in your testimony and the emphasis and importance of listening. And I think at this time, we need more listening than talking. So that's all I have to say. Thank you very much for your willingness to serve. And, certainly, good luck as you move forward.

ANGEL QUIROS: Thank you, Senator Kelly.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Thank you, Senator Representative Gresko.

REP. GRESKO (121ST): Thank you, Mr. Chair. Just to indulge me for one more question. What is the Department's protocol for personnel that refuse to wear a mask while on the job?

ANGEL QUIROS: We've encountered that situation just one time. And the individual was refusing to wear a mask because of their religious rights -- religion. We placed that individual on administrative leave, and continue to work with the unions and the H.R. to ensure compliance with a with a mask way. So out of 6,000 employees, one individual.

REP. GRESKO (121ST): Thank you. And thank you, Mr. Chair. That was a question from a colleague who had texted me. That's all I have, Mr. Chair.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Thank you. I have a couple more questions. But before I do that, any other questions from Members of the Committee at all? Any other questions? I don't see anybody's hand up.

Commissioner, just I wanted to ask again, because we talked about the -- you said about 50% vaccination potential and their survey for staff. Was it about the same for inmates as well?

ANGEL QUIROS: The inmates -- I've not heard the inmates [inaudible] on Monday. And we're focusing on that first group, similar to the community 75 and older, and we have 27 of those individuals. And so far out of those 27, the majority have opted to take the vaccination. The only data that I have to compare was back in I want to say, probably September, October, when we went out with the flu shots. I believe only 35% of the population decided to take the flu shot. So then that's the educational piece, not just with our staff, but with the individuals on our custody was so important for us to get out there and get that face to face and ask those questions.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Okay, thank you very much. I would, again, just reiterate my concern about -- if only 50% at the moment are willing to be vaccinated of the Department of Correction staff, that, obviously, we need to get up to the herd immunity number of somewhere between 70% and 85%, that you would provide a report to legislative leaders and any relevant committee leaders about a plan if the number is below the herd immunity, because I think is going to be very important, as the vaccines roll out that we do our best, especially with Department of Corrections, to make sure that we are keeping everybody safe. So if you could just pledge to keep us updated as Legislative leaders and as relevant Committee members, that you would do that, if we stay below the herd immunity number at your Department.

ANGEL QUIROS: Will do and, Senator, would be okay for me to send you the information and you share? Or you want me to do my legislative liaison?

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): I would -- I would bet your legislative liaisons would probably prefer to send it out to members of legislative leadership and the relevant committees.

ANGEL QUIROS: Got it.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Okay? Okay. Thank you. I don't see any other questions. And I -- anybody else? No. Okay. And then I don't -- we don't have any testimony from the public that has been given to us as well to put into the record. So there's no further questions. Is -- our typical thing that we ask Commissioner, I like -- again, well, I congratulate you on your appointment as Commissioner. I think you've done a great job. And we certainly appreciate the fact that you've worked up the line and think that you bring a lot of experience to that as well. Unfortunately, those of us in the Senate can't vote for you, because it's a House Resolution, but we do want to congratulate you nonetheless and appreciate how you have worked through the -- up the ladder through your career in the state and in your personal story and how you shared that with all of us for sure. But we have one question. We ask you of every nominee. Is there anything in your past that you believe might prove embarrassing to this Committee, to the Governor or to the State of Connecticut?

ANGEL QUIROS: No.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Okay, great. Thank you so much, and we appreciate it. With that, Madam Clerk, I think we will end our public hearing.

WENDY FRITZ: Thank you.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Okay? And why don't we, at this point, we can convene the Committee meeting.

WENDY FRITZ: Sure.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): The only item of business that we have right now. I think we can dispense on any kind of remarks from the Chairs at this point. And we have a -- under number three, one, we have a resolution confirming Angel Quiros Jr. of Windsor to be the Commissioner of Correction,, and only House member can nominate and second the nomination and our Clerk will call just House members on the roll.

REP. GRESKO (121ST): So moved. Yeah.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Okay, moved.

SENATOR KENNEDY (119TH): Second, okay.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Moved by -- moved by Representative Vargas, seconded by Representative Kennedy. And, Madam Clerk, would you call the roll, please? And you have to be on screen to vote, I guess, right?

WENDY FRITZ: Correct.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): The house member, yep.

WENDY FRITZ: Gresko?

REP. GRESKO (121ST): Gresko votes yes.

WENDY FRITZ: Quinn?

REP. QUINN (82ND): Quinn votes yes.

WENDY FRITZ: Kennedy?

REP. KENNEDY (119TH): Kennedy votes yes.

WENDY FRITZ: D'Agostino? Godfrey?

REP. GODFREY (110TH): Godfrey votes yes.

WENDY FRITZ: Perillo?

REP. PERILLO (113TH): Perillo votes yes.

WENDY FRITZ: Yaccarino? You're muted, sir.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): David, you're muted.

REP. VARGAS (6TH): You have to unmute yourself.

REP. YACCARINO: Sorry. Yaccarino votes yes. Thank you.

WENDY FRITZ: Vargas?

REP. VARGAS (6TH): Vargas votes yes.

WENDY FRITZ: All set.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Okay, why don't we hold them meeting open for members who may need to still vote? It's a -- it's almost 12 now so why don't we say two o'clock. Would that work? Would that work, Mr. Chair? Miss -- Representative Gresko?

REP. GRESKO (121ST): Yeah, works for me.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Okay, so hold it open till two o'clock. All right, Madam Clerk. Is there -- do we have a date and time for our next meeting?

WENDY FRITZ: Yes, there will be a Public Hearing, followed by a Committee meeting on Thursday, February 4th three nominees for state Board of Education.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Okay, great. All right, everybody. Thank you so much. Have a great day. Be safe.

REP. YACCARINO (87TH): You too.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Take care.

REP. GRESKO (121ST): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

REP. KENNEDY (119TH): Thank you, Mr. Chair, and be safe, everyone.

SENATOR DUFF (25TH): Thank you. We'll recess the meeting.