



STATE OF CONNECTICUT DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION



Ned Lamont
Governor

Angel Quiros
Commissioner

OFFICE OF THE COMMISSIONER

Good morning, Representatives Stafstrom and Fishbein, Senators Winfield and Kissel and the members of the Judiciary Committee. I am Angel Quiros, the Commissioner for the Department of Correction. I am here to testify on Senate Bill 459.

I am pleased to report that through consistent, collaborative, productive conversation, the Department of Correction and Stop Solitary CT have reached agreement on substitute language for this legislation. I wish to thank Barbara Fair and Stop Solitary CT for their advocacy and willingness to understand the intricacies and challenges of our unique agency. As commissioner, I must prioritize the safety of people in our custody, DOC employees — who are not only correction officers but also teachers, chaplains, medical staff, mental health counselors, and addiction counselors—as well as volunteers and visitors.

Collectively, Stop Solitary CT and the DOC focused on the objective of minimizing the long-term impact of incarceration, while simultaneously maintaining a safe and secure environment for our staff and the individuals in our custody. We have identified ways to continue to increase out-of-cell time and to increase transparency by establishing a Correctional Ombuds office and an advisory committee. These are just two of the highlights contained in the agreement reached with Stop Solitary CT. The Department of Correction knows that this will be an on-going, continual, and evolving process should the bill be enacted. I am committed and optimistic that, through our joint efforts, Connecticut will remain at the forefront of progressive correctional practice. I urge the Judiciary Committee to strongly consider and accept the substitute language agreed to by DOC and Stop Solitary. In addition, I would note the proposed substitute language includes provisions which will require the General Assembly to provide funding for the Correctional Ombuds staffing and operations. I would ask that the Judiciary Committee work with the Appropriations Committee to meet these legislatively-defined needs.

Finally, I would like to briefly speak on Senate Bill 460. Although I overall have minimal concerns, I would like to call attention to one section of the bill which the Department strongly opposes. Section 8 of the bill requires that, during a declared emergency such as a natural disaster or pandemic, I must grant 22 days per month (up 224 days) of public emergency release credits except for certain criminal convictions for all inmates within a year of their end-of-sentence date. Without discretion and input from the Department of Correction, individuals who may be of serious risk to the public or who have caused serious damage to their victims or victims' families, or their own families, will be automatically released.

We will also be in many situations where we will have to automatically release individuals into homelessness and without adequate medical, mental health, or substance abuse supports in the community. In addition, these type of mass releases could occur during the middle of a dire emergency, at a time when the public assistance system will already be severely tested. To ensure the safety of Connecticut residents, crime victims, and returning citizens, the Department must have discretionary authority to determine those who should be awarded public emergency release credits

I thank the Judiciary Committee for the opportunity to comment on Senate Bills 459 and 460 and their impact on Connecticut residents and the Department of Correction. I will be happy to answer any questions committee members may have.

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