Hello, my name is Roberto Alvarado, I am from Bridgeport, and I would like to offer my testimony in support of The Protect Act, Bill no: SB 459. I have been incarcerated for 23 years, since I was 19 years old, and it has been my experience that the State Legislature, this committee, and the public are being misled by the Department of Corrections (D.O.C.). It is a myth that the draconian operating conditions in the CT prison system are necessary to maintain order. It is simply not true. It is a false narrative perpetrated by D.O.C. staff in order to profit from fear.

It is my experience that the vast majority of inmates follow the rules, and seek to do their time in peace. Ironically, when issues do arise among inmates, or with staff it is usually due to the lack of time we spend outside of our cells. To be specific, there are about 50 inmates allowed out for 1 hour and 40 minutes for recreation period. There are 2 showers, and 10 telephones available, (if all are working properly), for inmates to use during this period of time. What this ratio of resources to inmates creates is a mad dash for phones and showers. Subsequently fights/arguments arise over phone and shower usage. There is simply not enough time for every inmate to use the phone and shower during an hour and 40 minute recreation period. To some of you this may sound insignificant, however to a prisoner, especially in the midst of the pandemic as visits were cancelled, a telephone call is our only means of communicating with our loved ones.
Some may even say, "Well that's prison." While I agree that prison should not be a comfortable experience, it should also not be a harmful one. We are sent to prison as punishment not to be punished.

Furthermore, I strongly suggest that the Protect Act define "out-of-cell-time. This vague term allows the D.O.C. to undermine the true intent of laws such as the Protect Act. This became evident upon the governor's executive order of 4 hours of "out-of-cell" time. While the order seeks to promote the well-being of inmates, the D.O.C. specifically Cheshire C.I undermined the order by re-working the meal times from 20 min per meal to 30 min per meal, thus satisfying the order. This is a way to get around the idea of allowing inmate's out-of-their cells for any meaningful amount of time. It does not take inmates 30 minutes to eat the meals we are served. As such when an officer sees that a table of inmates are done eating, they are told to go back to their cells, even if the time allotted is not over. Hence meals usually take 15 minutes or less.

And finally in defining "out-of-cell" time please include 1 or 2 hours of outside recreation daily. This is because there is a growing number of inmates, including myself, who are being prescribed vitamin D due to our lack of sun intake. Cheshire C.I is particularly egregious in this regard only allowing inmates outside for 2 months out of the year. And only 3 times a week, 1 hour each time, in those 2 months. To be clear Cheshire C.I inmates are only allowed outside
for approximately 24 hours in one year! It is implausible that tax payer funds are being utilized on vitamin D prescriptions rather than allowing inmates outside where vitamin D is free.

I urge this committee to pass the Protect Act. It, you, have the potential to create long overdue changes. It is time that prisoners are viewed as fathers, mothers, uncles, aunts, brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews, as loved ones, as members of the community, as Human Beings.

Thank You