Testimony in SUPPORT of:
S.B. No. 458 “AN ACT CONCERNING THE PROVISION OF SUBSTANCE USE DISORDER SERVICES AND MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES TO INDIVIDUALS WHO ARE INCARCERATED.”
&
S.B. No. 459 “AN ACT CONCERNING THE COMMISSION FOR CORRECTIONAL OVERSIGHT, THE USE OF ISOLATED CONFINEMENT, SECLUSION, RESTRAINTS, STRIP SEARCHES, SOCIAL CONTACTS FOR INCARCERATED PERSONS, TRANSPARENCY FOR CONDITIONS OF INCARCERATION AND CORRECTIONAL OFFICER TRAINING.”
Judiciary Committee Public Hearing - Friday, March 25, 2022 ~ 10:00 a.m.

Good morning Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, Senator Kissel, Representative Fishbein, and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony. My name is Mike Finley and I am the Public Policy Coordinator for Mental Health Connecticut (MHC). I wish to share comments in regards to S.B. 458 An Act Concerning The Provision Of Substance Use Disorder Services And Mental Health Services To Individuals Who Are Incarcerated and S.B. 459 An Act Concerning The Commission For Correctional Oversight, The Use Of Isolated Confinement, Seclusion, Restraints, Strip Searches, Social Contacts For Incarcerated Persons, Transparency For Conditions Of Incarceration And Correctional Officer Training.

MHC strongly SUPPORTS S.B. 458 as it will require the Commissioner of Correction to review, evaluate, and make recommendations on the provision of substance use disorder treatment services and mental health services to individuals who are incarcerated. MHC supports prevention, intervention, and treatment of substance abuse and mental health conditions across the state’s system of care. Investing in consistent access and delivery of care in the Department of Correction facilities will create pathways to mental wellness and increase the potential of preventing behavioral health conditions from taking root or worsening an individual’s health.

MHC strongly SUPPORTS S.B. 459 as it will codify Governor Lamont’s executive order into law to ensure no one is in solitary beyond 15 days, increases the minimum time out of cell to 5 hours a day, and has a powerful structure for oversight. This legislation also ensures oversight & accountability, mitigation of extreme isolation, ends misuse of lockdowns, promotes correctional officer wellness, and promotes transparency.

Over the past 50 years, America has gone from institutionalizing people with mental health diagnoses, often in subhuman conditions, to incarcerating them at unprecedented and appalling rates—putting recovery out of reach for millions of Americans. “On any given day, between 300,000 and 400,000 people with mental health diagnoses are incarcerated in jails and prisons across the United States, and more than 500,000 people with mental health diagnoses are under correctional control in the community.”

1 MHC supports effective, accessible mental health treatment for all people who need it

who are confined in adult or juvenile correctional facilities or under correctional control. People with mental health and substance use conditions also need an effective classification system to protect vulnerable prisoners and preserve their human rights.\(^2\) Notwithstanding the loss of their liberty, prisoners with mental health and substance use conditions retain all other rights, and these must be zealously defended.

MHC urges this committee to support both S.B. 458 and S.B. 459 as written and to continue championing policies that help to improve the worsening mental health crisis in the state.

Respectfully,
Mike Finley