SB 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
March 25, 2022
Submitted by: Stephen Wanczyk-Karp, LMSW

The National Association of Social Workers, CT Chapter supports Bill 459. NASW/CT opposes the punitive and inhumane practice of solitary confinement, and support the measures taken in 459 to alleviate some of the most damaging aspects of such confinement.

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

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

Significant increase in mental health services is needed in our state’s correctional facilities. Employment of additional clinical social workers and other mental health providers who are trained in the treatment of PTSD and severe mental illness, is a much better approach then use of restricted housing and solitary confinement.
Commission will have needed authority for public oversight of correctional facilities.

NASW/CT supports the bill’s provisions on mitigating the severe harm caused by isolation, ends the misuse of lock downs, promotes support for correctional staff that will in turn benefit inmates, and promotes public transparency.

NASW/CT also supports the bill’s provisions on visitation rights. Connection to family and significant others will greatly assist the inmates in staying connected to their community and family and will have positive emotional and psychological benefits. Prohibiting denial of a visitor due to a past incarceration is a particularly positive provision in this bill.

We urge that work continues toward the elimination of solitary confinement. SB 459 is a positive step toward that eventuality.