Testimony of Jason Wasserman
President of Restorative Action Alliance

WRITTEN TESTIMONY Supporting Senate Bill 459 (Protect Act)- 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.

March 25, 2022

Chairs Winfield and Stafstrom, Vice Chairs Flexer and Blumenthal, Ranking Members Kissel and Fishbein and distinguished members of the Judiciary Committee:

My name is Jason Wasserman, I am a resident of South Windsor and President of Restorative Action Alliance. Restorative Action Alliance is a group of anti-carceral crime survivors, individuals impacted by the criminal legal system, and restorative advocates and practitioners. I am writing to you today to express support for Senate Bill 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.

I watched the public hearings and debates in the House and Senate over the previous, more comprehensive, version of this bill. I saw overwhelming support from the religious community through Greater Hartford Interfaith Action Alliance (GHIAA) and Congregations Organized for a New Connecticut (Conect) and from advocates who oppose the use of torture in our state.

I have had the opportunity to speak with some of Connecticut’s most vocal organizers, Barbara Fair, Tracy Bernardi and Ray Boyd to hear from them what Solitary Confinement in Connecticut has done to them personally and to the people they care about. I cheered with them when the House and the Senate passed the bill.

I was extremely frustrated when Governor Lamont vetoed the bill and instead issued an executive order. That executive order can be rescinded at any time, especially with a new administration. Even with that executive order, I have heard stories of retribution from correctional officers essentially punishing the incarcerated population for attempting to have the Protect Act passed.
As I wrote in my testimony last year, we all witnessed people comparing the isolation from the Covid-related lockdowns to prison. People lived in the comfort of their own homes and still went “stir crazy,” and equated the experience to that of being in a prison. While the experience of staying at home to avoid a deadly virus is nothing like the forced isolation while incarcerated, it does start to show us that putting people into isolation is cruel.

When people are sentenced to incarceration, they give up many rights. However, they don’t stop being human and the state needs to treat them with some dignity. This bill provides some much-needed oversight to ensure that abuses do not continue to happen.

I understand that Stop Solitary Connecticut has met with the Department of Corrections to devise this revised bill that would garner the DOC’s support. It is imperative that the legislature does what it can to stop the use of state-sanctioned torture. As a citizen of Connecticut, I care about all citizens, including those who are incarcerated. How we treat people while they’re incarcerated matters. I personally do not accept torture being done to anyone in my name.

I strongly support and urge you to favorably vote Senate Bill 459 out of the Judiciary Committee and see its passage once again through the House and Senate with Governor Lamont signing it into law this time.