2/22/23
Appropriations Committee
Legislative Office Building, Room 2700
Hartford, CT 06106

Sen. Osten, Rep. Walker, Sen. Winfield, Rep. Candelaria, and members of the committee,

My name is Darius Henry Jones from New Haven CT. Thank you for the opportunity to submit this written testimony in regards to HB No. 6659, an act concerning the state budget for the biennium ending June 13th, 2025, and making appropriations therefor. **I am writing to express my support of EMERGE Connecticut™ as they seek to remain at their current level of support - $500,000 per year - in the Judicial and Corrections budget for fiscal years ending in 2024 and 2025.**

Since 2011, EMERGE has operated as an Employment Social Enterprise based in New Haven, CT for people transitioning home from incarceration. As both a nonprofit organization and certified home improvement contractor, EMERGE is able to offer paid employment on their construction, landscaping, and property maintenance crews. While earning a paycheck and building on vocational skillsets, EMERGE crewmembers engage in a series of programs designed to end the pattern of recidivism. Through peer mentorship, increased access to essential resources, and group curriculums that serve to de-stigmatize mental emotional wellness, EMERGE's approach has yielded an 11% cumulative 2-year recidivism rate since 2011, and **just 3% of EMERGE's 2018 cohort returned to prison compared to 20% of people statewide**.[1]

In 2021, this committee made an investment in supporting EMERGE's results-driven model in the wake of Northern CI's closing. You knew, as EMERGE did, that the reduction of Connecticut's prison population to the lowest it's been since 1990 would have been in vain if there was no support for the people being released. EMERGE's impact was felt deeply in New Haven, the county with the highest number of incarcerated residents and the highest incarceration rate in the state.[2] **Because of your support in 2021, EMERGE was able to meet the demand of the increased number of returning citizens**, enrolling and employing 79 people in the first 18 months, and increasing their access to employment, basic needs, and mental health supports. In the first year, EMERGE alumni experienced an 82% job retention rate, and our numbers only continue to grow.

With Willard CI closing this year, Connecticut's reform efforts continue, making it critically important that this committee continue their investment. EMERGE is asking for the same level of support, $500,000 per year, to continue this much-needed combination of services.

With your continued investment, EMERGE is now not only positioned to continue making an impact in New Haven, but will also be able **to start up operations for the first time in Bridgeport.** It is my hope that the investment in the men and women returning home to our communities through EMERGE will continue.

Sincerely,

Darius H Jones
Alumni Board Member

[1] CT Office of Policy and Management, 2022.
[2] Prison Policy Initiative, 2022