

Name: Anonymous Anonymous

Title:

Organization or Agency:

Topic: Meeting Date Not Listed

NA

Testimony:

Barbara Fair for Correction Ombudsperson

Dear Correction Advisory Committee:

I'm writing to you today to strongly encourage you to appoint Barbara Fair for the position of Correction Ombudsperson within the Connecticut Office of Governmental Accountability.

I'm writing from inside a prison cell at York Correctional Institution where I have resided for almost 14 years. During this time I have lived with both the positives (like program opportunities) and the negatives (too many to list) that are part of prison life. One of the most positive experiences I've been part of was being a live-in mentor for young adults in the WORTH unit. It was there that I met Barbara Fair. She was a volunteer for the Rikers Debate Project and came in once a week to assist in the learning.

Those regular weekly classes offered me a chance to get to know Barbara. She is warm, intelligent, committed, and invested in the humane treatment of all those who endure incarceration. This passion stemmed from her own child's unfortunate experiences in prison and has continued to grow as she has learned how common the barbaric mistreatment inside the prison is. Her personal hands-on approach and her ability to truly listen allowed her to reach these young women and build trust. Her own pro-social attitude is truly contagious.

These attributes in combination with her unparalleled and continuous work on behalf of incarcerated citizens like myself makes her a perfect fit for the position of ombudsperson. However, Im well aware these are also the very reasons many would want to exclude her from such a needed assignment. Barbara Fair would do the job and do it with integrity, something many in the DOC's rank and file would be fearful of.

Regarding the negative aspects of prison life: Every day I'm exposed to unsafe, unsanitary, and undignified conditions. I've been harassed and targeted for trying to advocate for prisoners' rights, set up for not accepting sexual advances by staff, and degraded by continual and unnecessary strip searches... just to name a few. Because I know her, I know without a doubt that if I'd had a strong advocate like Barbara Fair to investigate these issues, the outcomes of these egregious affronts would have been very different. Having staff accountability by way of an ombudsperson like Barbara would mean that perhaps I, and many I know, would not live with the fear that keeps us accepting these unjust circumstances which diminish our feelings of self-worth.

What I've come to understand is that this erasure of self-worth in incarcerated people is purposely perpetuated by staff. It happens in subtle ways such as the COs' use of degrading language and threats, and it is done using blatantly aggressive behaviors like sexual advances and denial of rights. This intentional dehumanizing is woven into the very fabric of life in prison and sadly, it is in large part responsible for our proliferating recidivism.

It is my sincere belief that an ombudsperson like Barbara Fair would do so much to alleviate the ongoing mistreatment at the hands of emboldened and unchecked staff. That in turn would reduce the feelings of powerlessness and victimization present in the incarcerated population, hence raising our feelings of self-worth. This restoration of self-worth then translates to reduced recidivism and better prepared returning

citizens...who will, in fact, be your neighbors.

I thank you for your time and implore you to do what's best for the correctional system as a whole. This means fair treatment of incarcerated people and accountability for the staff, creating a safe and transparent environment for all. This can be accomplished by hiring Barbara Fair as ombudsperson.

Respectfully,

An incarcerated person at York Correctional Institution