

**Name:** Anonymous Anonymous

**Title:**

**Organization or Agency:** York Correctional Institution

**Topic:** Meeting Date Not Listed

NA

**Testimony:**

Dear Governor Lamont and members of the Corrections Advisory Committee:

As the candidates for CT Ombudsperson are narrowed down, I ask you to give close consideration to Barbara Fair. She is the best candidate for many reasons including CT's need for diversity in positions of oversight in corrections. Ms. Fair is not only a highly qualified woman, she is a highly qualified woman of color, which assures me that she has encountered the inherent difficulties that inevitably come with being a woman and a racial minority. Who better to represent a marginalized community?

What makes Ms. Fair even more valuable is her lived experience as a mother who has been tethered to the system by way of her formerly incarcerated sons. As someone who has directly experienced the fear, frustration and helplessness that goes hand in hand with having a loved one in prison, she will bring the requisite empathy needed when dealing with incarcerated people and their concerned family members. Additionally, her experience has granted her an intimate understanding of the failures within the system. In this way, she will come into the position with solutions to problems other candidates might not yet have even recognized.

Ms. Fair has proven her dedication to change through her tireless advocacy work. Her proven tenacity and palpable passion for justice will ensure improvement in all aspects of corrections. Staff relations will strengthen amongst themselves and with their charges, leading to better work conditions. Incarcerated people will feel protected, which lessens the anxiety and hostility that often accompany being dismissed, feeling invisible or unsafe.

It's easy to justify indifference, neglect or violence against the incarcerated because people in prison are viewed as deserving of all kinds of misery. As a society we have adopted and perpetuated this destructive, counterproductive attitude and accepted an institution that ensures that suffering by the way in which it is staffed and operated. Ms. Fair endeavors to dismantle this paradigm and replace it with one of mutual respect, dignity and cooperation--and much needed transparency. Understanding that these features are an integral part of successful corrections (and what it ostensibly aims to do for the people in need of "correcting"), I ask that she be given the opportunity to implement her plan.

In saying this, it is also a very real reality that Ms. Fair will be overlooked for all the reasons that make her not just suitable for the position, but perfect for it. People don't want to be held accountable. The status quo is a comfortable place for many because it asks nothing of them. Ms. Fair's call for justice will disrupt the existing state of affairs, and her zeal to create a model of active listening and true oversight, where no one is unheard or unseen, is unlike any previous administration. Once things are seen and heard, they must be addressed. This will upset the present "hear no evil, see no evil" cover-up culture in corrections and those guilty of complaisance. For all others, we welcome her. Her agenda, which includes the highest ranking members of corrections, to line staff and the people they manage, is an exciting change to look forward to.

As a justice involved person who belongs to a close-knit family (which means that they have suffered right along with me), my family and I have long awaited this change—one that can only happen with a governor who is brave enough, smart enough and cares enough to select someone who will not look the other way, be satisfied with the status quo or become complicit in the enduring indifference and lack of accountability that marks corrections from the bottom up.

Irrespective of what anyone has done, prison is a place that people are sent to AS punishment, not FOR punishment. However, the manner in which guards are trained, their generic "martial law" mindset and mission, and the lack of meaningful oversight send the opposite message.

Governor Lamont and Committee members, I wish that you could see for yourselves the gradual but swift transformation of the newly employed guards and what they turn into once they become fully immersed in prison culture and realize what they can get away with and the things they can say and do with impunity. It's wholly shameful but true that the cruel and the indifferent outnumber those who do their job with benevolence and dignity.

No other institution in this country accepts the kind of warped standard of treatment as does "corrections"--not even animal shelters. We rightfully expect that shelters are safe, humane places. But imagine if animal handlers withheld medical treatment, food or out of cage time as punishment. How would the public react if they learned that shelter personnel used excessive force, spoke abusively to their charges, and deliberately instilled fear in them? What if coworkers and supervisors turned their heads while other staff members committed acts of physical, mental, emotional or sexual violence against the animals in their care? What lengths would we go to as a society to make sure that THOSE animals (the handlers, that is) were removed from their position, prosecuted and replaced? Would we not demand those measures? This is where Ms. Fair comes in.

This could be the beginning of a much needed turn around that has the potential to affect not just the individual but also our communities in positive and significant ways. After all, the people we create in prisons are the people who will eventually return to society. We want to set people up to succeed--difficult to do when one has spent months, years or even decades in an environment that incubates terror, resentment, defiance and hate. Again, please give Ms. Fair your vote of confidence for the position of ombudsperson. Ms. Fair's plan will shift the current culture as he will demand that corrections live up to its name.

Respectfully,  
An incarcerated person  
York Correctional Institution