

Name: Scott Sheppard

Title:

Organization or Agency:

Topic: Meeting Date Not Listed

NA

Testimony:

Barbara Fair for Correction Ombudsperson

My name is Scott Sheppard and I am currently incarcerated at York Correctional Institution in Niantic Connecticut. I have been incarcerated for almost 13 years, and will be released back into the community in 3 years. I am writing to you today in hopes that Barbara Fair becomes the next selected Ombudsperson for the Connecticut Department of Corrections. My experience as an incarcerated individual at York C.I. has been close to tortuous in many instances. I believe that by selecting Barbara Fair as the next Ombudsperson, she can help change the way incarcerated folks are being mistreated at the hands of the Department of Corrections. Through her tireless work with Stop Solitary CT, she has proven her ability and dedication to put and end to the abuses which we suffer at the hands of the DOC.

I spent almost 8 years of my incarceration in solitary confinement. The damage from isolation will continue to have a life long effect on me throughout my life. Locking a human being up for years on end expecting them to just one day magically change their behaviors, is unrealistic. Solitary confinement offers NO means of rehabilitation and can further damage a persons mental well being. People become more angry and resort to violent behavior when they are locked up like a caged animal for 23 hours a day. Solitary confinement offers no means of rehabilitation. I know this first hand. No programing, no social interaction with other human beings, mistreatment by prison staff, all result in negative behaviors. Barbara Fair is against long term isolation, and for good reason. She sees the damage is creates and how it changes people for the worst.

I am also transgender and identify as male. During my incarceration, I began testosterone hormone therapy in 2019. I legally changed my name through the Berlin Probate Court. I have since underwent 2 gender affirming surgeries while incarcerated at York. I recently had gender affirming "top surgery" on 12/28/23 at Uconn. I fought DOC for almost 3 years to receive this life saving surgery. DOC intentionally delayed this surgery, and it had devastating effects on my mental health which resulted in self harm. Through my experience transitioning while incarcerated, I have been the target of hate by custody staff as well as some medical staff. The treatment of transgender persons in prison needs to change. There needs to be better training for staff members. I believe Barbara Fair would make sure staff are being properly trained in dealing with the transgender population. Our adjustment needs are unique and sensitive. Gender dysphoria is a serious medical condition that greatly affects mental health if not treated properly.

Religious services are extremely important for rehabilitation. I am Muslim, and recently went to the media which an article was printed on December 7th, 2023, when York took our 2 Imams out of the facility. That left us without Islamic services for almost 2 months. I felt discriminated against since this never happens to the other religious denominations services. Religious services provide healing, safety, solidarity, and most important, the ability to practice my faith which boosts my mental health. If Barbara Fair was selected Ombudsperson, I believe she would take violating constitutional rights seriously.

Governor, it is important to have a responsible and fair person overseeing the Department of Corrections. Just because I am incarcerated, I still deserve to be treated with respect and dignity. Many times, I have been treated inhumanely by staff at York. I am trying to make myself better so that once I am released, I have a chance at being successful. Mistreatment by staff in the correctional setting does not help the incarcerated become better people. It creates the opposite. Please select Barbara Fair to be

the the next Ombudsperson, because she is trustworthy and has our best interests at heart. She will make sure our needs are being met and would address mistreatment. Thank you for allowing me to share my story with you. Thank you for your time. Let's make rehabilitation in the Department of Correction a number one priority.

Sincerely yours,
Scott Sheppard