

Government Oversight Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No.: HB-7186

AN ACT REQUIRING A REPORT CONCERNING THE USE OF BODY
SCANNING MACHINES AND STRIP AND CAVITY SEARCHES IN

Title: CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES.

Vote Date: 3/18/2025

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/11/2025

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Government Oversight Committee

Rep Hughes

Rep Gucker

REASONS FOR BILL:

This bill requires the Commissioner of Correction to purchase at least two body scanner machines and install at least one at the York Correctional Institution and at least one at the John R. Manson Youth Institution, Cheshire, and establish a pilot program and directives that prioritize using machines to inspect inmates who are incarcerated in those institutions in lieu of correctional personnel conducting strip searches or cavity searches.

In addition, this bill requires DOC to submit a report by January 1, 2026, to the Government Oversight and Judiciary Committees, on the status of the procurement of body scanning machines for use in correctional facilities and information concerning the conduct of strip and cavity searches in such facilities.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE:

Added a pilot program in two institutions.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

Christina Ghio: Acting Child Advocate, Office of the Child Advocate:

Supports this legislation because they feel that strip and cavity searches take a very harsh toll on younger incarcerated people, who often times have histories of physical and sexual abuse. They found that the idea of facing a strip or cavity search can act as a deterrent to

taking advantage of opportunities to see their family, their lawyer or leave the corrections facility for any reason.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

Anonymous 1:

Supports this bill because they have experienced many strip and cavity searches while incarcerated and feels they are inhumane as they left them with significant mental trauma due to unprofessionalism and cruelty by the corrections officers. They feel they are unnecessary and ineffective as they expressed that corrections officers are the source of most of the contraband in prisons, therefore it is pointless to search inmates. They also felt that the "blue wall" protects corrections officers from facing any form of accountability and filing a report would only lead to retribution from any officers named in a complaint.

Anonymous 2:

Supports this bill because they were subject to multiple unnecessary cavity searches following participation in an experiment at a UConn facility. This individual did not once leave the site of three separate individuals, two of whom were corrections officers and remained on constant, uninterrupted surveillance tape. This individual was also deemed the lowest security risk. They felt that there was no way a reasonable person could conclude that they obtained contraband while at this UConn facility.

Anonymous 3: Supports this legislation because they believe that conducting strip and cavity searches are useless and are done for the sake of subjecting inmates to shame and humiliation and can be very triggering to the women at York C.I. who have fallen victim to sexual assault. They feel that since technology has evolved to provide an alternative, body scanners should be phased in as strip and cavity searches harm inmates more than it keeps any of them safe.

DeAndre Brown: BLM860, Stop Solitary CT:

Supports this legislation as he felt that strip and cavity searches significantly and permanently harmed his mental health. He described the experience as a "perverted sexual assault" and that no one should be subject to this violation of human rights. He also feels that inmates are unfairly blamed for contraband in prisons, as it is corrections officers who are responsible for most of the contraband in prisons.

Randal Chinnoek: Founder/Director, CT 2nd Look Sentencing:

Supports this legislation because they feel that when objectively viewing the practice of strip and cavity searches, they are blatantly inhumane. They pose the hypothetical of strip and cavity searching anyone who boards an airplane to point out that they are an unacceptable, cruel practice in any other setting, therefore they should not be used in prisons.

Barbara Fair: LCSW, Stop Solitary CT:

Supports this legislation, however, opposes a study or report on the practice as it just delays the reform we need. She calls the practice of strip and cavity searching state sanctioned sexual violence, as described by the stories of victims she's heard. She believes that this practice is ineffective at catching contraband because studies and court cases have shown that often it is corrections officers who bring contraband into these facilities. Therefore, it is

unnecessary to continue this cruel, useless practice because it subjects inmates to more harm than it allegedly protects them from, and that inmates are not the problem.

Hassan Foster:

Supports this legislation because they felt that the experience of being cavity searched was like that of being raped and beaten. He also cites that other states no longer use the practice and that there are no excuses to continue strip and cavity searches at prisons in Connecticut. They feel that subjecting human beings to this practice makes people more violent, scarred and traumatized which could lead to recidivism, and at the very least, lead to PTSD. They believe that this practice goes against human rights and contrary to the idea of "correcting."

Jose Garcia:

Supports this legislation because they feel no one should be subject to such inhumane treatment. They also expressed that they have heard from people on the other side, corrections officers, that they make light and fun of the practice, making jokes and rude comments that make the process of being strip and cavity searched even worse and dehumanizing.

Tracie Guzman: Smart Justice Leader, ACLU CT:

Supports this legislation because they feel that the practice of strip and cavity searches should be banned as part of the Prison Rape Elimination Act, PREA. Having experienced thousands of strip searches, she felt that she had been a victim of sexual violence. She was left with severe PTSD and feels that since there is a more humane alternative, it must be taken.

Katherine Hill: PhD Candidate, Yale:

Supports this legislation because they feel that body scanners provide a significantly more humane alternative to strip and cavity searches which subjects individuals to a plethora of issues upon release that could lead to reincarceration. She states that the practice of strip searching in prisons is a form of state-sanctioned sexual violence based off the work she has done with inmates who have experienced the practice.

Lori LeDonne: Smart Justice Leader, ACLU CT:

Supports this legislation because they've experienced what they describe as the horror of a strip and cavity search. This individual states that there have never been weapons found during a cavity search and that the process felt like it was meant to dehumanize her. She was subject to rude comments and was very concerned with the fact that it was always recorded. She was terrified of the potential repercussions, so she was hesitant to file a report of misconduct despite the unprofessionalism that felt like it was intended to be cruel.

Nancy Peters: Organizer, Brothers and Sisters United:

Opposes this legislation because they believe that based off their experiences and knowledge, strip and cavity searches rarely yield contraband since there is little to no data that demonstrates their effectiveness in keeping contraband out of prisons. This furthers the case that it is corrections officers who are responsible for the vast majority of contraband coming into prisons. This leads her to believe that the true intentions of strip and cavity searches are to insert dominance and control by the corrections officers. They also state that this disproportionately affects people of color, as they make up the majority of prisoners in this state.

Terri Ricks: Smart Justice Leader, ACLU CT:

Supports this legislation because having been subject to strip and cavity searches, she endures significant trauma compounded by that of being sexually assaulted. The mental impact of being strip and cavity searched led her to canceling family visits as she'd be subject to two of them, one before and one after the visit. She feels that they are useless because it is the correctional officers who more often bring contraband into the prisons, therefore she does not think that they are making anyone in prison safer, and if anything puts inmates in harm's way.

Josiah Schlee: Cannabis Advocate, CT Cannawarriors:

Supports this legislation and wants to see it taken one step further by skipping the study and moving straight to the implementation of the devices. He feels that this practice subjects inmates, lots of whom have committed nonviolent crimes and have a history of abuse, to unnecessary trauma and strips people of their dignity.

Amber Vlangas: Executive Director, Restorative Action Alliance:

Supports this legislation because they believe that the practice of strip and cavity searches constitutes sexual violence perpetrated by state employees. She feels that strip and cavity searches, like other forms of sexual violence are done with the intent to control and degrade, and that they serve no rehabilitative purpose. In no other setting is this form of treatment of another human being acceptable, and she references event venues and airports as other places in which technology is used to accomplish the same goal as a strip or cavity search.

Caitlin Bodamer:

Supports this legislation because they feel that the practice of strip or cavity searching an inmate is likely to cause serious mental health issues which often leads to reincarceration, which can further strain the Department of Corrections. They feel that human dignity among these inmates is well worth the cost of the scanners. She is also disturbed by the fact that there is little to no data or insight on the number of these searches conducted, and whether or not they yield contraband. Therefore, there is no way to truly measure just how harmful these procedures can be.

Christina Capitan: Co-founder, CT CannaWarriors:

Supports this legislation because they feel it will modernize security practices, protect personal dignity and ensure our state does not subject individuals, including ones who are incarcerated for nonviolent cannabis related crimes, to humiliating and outdated procedures which do more harm than good.

Ian Cooke:

Supports this legislation because they feel the practice of strip and cavity searches serves no other purpose than to humiliate and dominate an inmate. They state that they feel it is unnecessary and unrealistic to eliminate the practice as it does serve a purpose, but that something drastic must be done.

Kathleen Flaherty: Executive Director, Connecticut Legal Rights Project:

Supports this legislation because the practice of strip or cavity searching takes a detrimental impact on the mental health of the incarcerated, especially those with trauma history. She and her organization have determined that these searches are conducted with no probable cause that an individual is concealing contraband on their person. This sets a dangerous precedent, as well as subjects vulnerable individuals to harmful practices without true due process.

Hud'El Gamble:

Supports this legislation because he stated that in any other setting, regardless of the circumstances, ordering an individual to remove their clothes and touch themselves or face physical force would constitute sexual assault. This proves that strip and cavity searches should be banned under the PERA.

Sheldon Higgins:

Supports this legislation because he has been routinely subject to strip and cavity searches as an incarcerated person, and believes they do nothing to address the real issue of contraband within correctional institutions while only harming the mental health of inmates.

Martha Klein: R.N., B.S.N., M.P.H.:

Supports this legislation because they feel that the guidelines around conducting a strip/cavity search must be improved with the intent of eliminating most of them. She concluded that body cavity searches necessitate the existence of probable cause that a suspect is concealing a weapon, evidence, or contraband within their body, and that they must be done by a medical professional, according to federal guidelines.

Debra Martinez:

Supports this legislation because they believe that the practice of strip and cavity searches constitutes violent sexual abuse. In no other setting is this type of behavior tolerated, and it is even criminalized. Therefore, it has no place in prisons, being conducted by agents of the state.

Cindy Prizio: One Standard of Justice:

Supports this legislation because she believes that, based on data from the state of Washington and studies done on that data, since they switched to using scanners in 2019, they've been 5 times more effective at catching contraband, and putting more prisoners into segregation as a result.

Olivia Rinkes:

Supports this legislation because the nature of her studies have led her to the conclusion that the practice of strip and cavity searches is incredibly harmful to inmates and leaves them with lasting mental issues. She goes on to cite the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners, and the ways Connecticut can align with these international mandates on the treatment of prisoners.

Andres Sosa:

Supports this legislation because they felt as if they were falling victim to rape when getting searched. He also testifies that corrections officers download videos of searches and share them amongst themselves and even amongst other inmates on their cell phones. He feels that corrections officers use this practice to abuse their power and terrorize inmates.

Ashley Turner:

Supports this legislation because she believes that the practice of strip and cavity searches constitutes state sanctioned sexual violence towards men, women and children. She has spoken with many formerly incarcerated and revealed that the corrections officers weaponize their power to conduct strip and cavity searches on inmates at their discretion.

Eugene Walker:

Supports this legislation because having been incarcerated for 12 years, they feel dehumanized, embarrassed and disgusted with the practice of being strip searched. He shared that some guards He feels that there are times when corrections officers go above and beyond to humiliate and degrade, like ordering inmates to touch their genitals and then put those fingers directly into their mouth for an oral inspection.

Jess Zaccagnino: Policy Counsel, ACLU CT:

Supports this legislation because she feels that often, young men of color are disproportionately subject to these procedures. As a result, these young men of color, who statistically make up the largest percentage of the prison population in this state, are disproportionately subject to this practice which leaves people with significant mental health issues which can lead to reincarceration, or worse behavior while behind bars, which can just keep people in the system.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

None expressed.

Reported by: Greg Wolff, Griffin Olshan

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