

Government Oversight Committee

JOINT FAVORABLE REPORT

Bill No: HB-5477 / [Bill Status](#) / [Public Hearing Testimony](#)

AN ACT CONCERNING THE WELL-BEING OF EMPLOYEES OF THE
DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTION AND PERSONS WHO ARE

Title: INCARCERATED IN CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTIONS.

Vote Date: 3/17/2026

Vote Action: Joint Favorable Substitute

PH Date: 3/10/2026

File No.:

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SPONSORS OF BILL:

Rep Dathan, Rep Collins Main, Rep Menapace

REASONS FOR BILL:

HB 5477 strengthens protections against sexual abuse in correctional settings by modernizing statutory definitions, expanding criminal liability, and increasing accountability within the Department of Correction (DOC). It requires timely (30-day) investigations of all incidents and mandates quarterly reporting of delays, while also enhancing penalties and clarifying offenses involving staff and individuals in custody. The bill introduces new training requirements, including body scanner use and annual mental health and trauma-informed training for staff, and calls for a confidential hotline to report abuse. It expands inmate access to crisis advocates, requires a comprehensive staffing and operational assessment, and establishes a long-term correctional culture change initiative with annual reporting. Additionally, it imposes a duty on DOC employees to intervene in and report abuse, protects them from retaliation, and creates a structured system for tracking, reviewing, and reporting such incidents to oversight bodies.

SUBSTITUTE LANGUAGE (IF APPLICABLE):

Corrects the definition of detainee in Sec 11 to refer to the Judicial Branch instead of DCF.

RESPONSE FROM ADMINISTRATION/AGENCY:

[Daniel Karpowitz, Undersecretary, Criminal Justice Policy and Planning Division](#)

(OPM): Testified with concerns on the bill. The testimony outlined ongoing state efforts to improve correctional healthcare and emphasized aligning legislation with existing initiatives, recommending modifications to avoid duplication and ensure coordination with current oversight and reform strategies.

[David McCluskey, Legislative Liaison, Connecticut Department of Correction](#): Testified in support, emphasizing that the Department already follows federal PREA standards, conducts regular audits, and provides training and reporting mechanisms. The testimony highlighted that the Governor's proposal strengthens protections, improves transparency, and expands notification requirements, while reaffirming DOC's commitment to preventing abuse and working with the legislature on implementation.

[Judicial Branch](#): Testified with general comments and recommended a technical amendment to clarify that the Judicial Branch, not the Department of Children and Families, has authority over juvenile residential centers in the bill's definition of "detainee."

[John R. DeBarba, Assistant Legal Counsel, Office of Chief Public Defender](#): Testified in support, backing provisions on reporting, training, oversight, and accountability for DOC staff, but opposing Sections 4 and 5 due to expanded mandatory minimums and vague statutory language, urging those provisions be removed or clarified.

[DeVaughn Ward, Department of Correction Ombudsman](#): Testified in support, highlighting that the bill strengthens PREA enforcement through clearer reporting, oversight, and accountability measures, including a duty for staff to intervene. He emphasized the importance of independent oversight and trauma-informed practices to better prevent and respond to sexual abuse in correctional facilities.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF SUPPORT:

[Renne LaMark Muir, State Representative, Connecticut General Assembly](#): Testified in support of the bill, stating that the bill strengthens protections against sexual abuse by codifying PREA standards, enhancing reporting, training, and accountability measures, and establishing confidential reporting systems. She also highlighted the importance of culture change, staffing improvements, and stronger oversight to address systemic issues within DOC and ensure safer conditions for both staff and incarcerated individuals.

[Alexander \(Alexis\) Combs, Incarcerated Individual, York Correctional Institution](#): Testified in support of this bill. The testimony described experiences of sexual harassment, abuse, and retaliation, particularly as a transgender individual, and emphasized the need for stronger accountability, staff training, and protections to prevent continued mistreatment in correctional facilities.

Beth Hamiltion, Executive Director, Connecticut Alliance to End Sexual

Violence: Testified in support of the bill with recommendations, emphasizing the need to codify PREA standards, strengthen oversight and reporting, expanding access to confidential support services, and improving accountability and protections for survivors in correctional facilities.

Cindy Prizio, President, One Standard of Justice: Testified with mixed views, supporting the bill's focus on accountability and prevention, but opposing expanded mandatory minimums and raising concerns about increased surveillance and lack of independent support for victims, urging a more balanced and evidence-based approach.

Andrew Clark, Institute for Municipal and Regional Policy: Testified in support of the bill, emphasizing that sections 9 and 10 create a coordinated, data- driven strategy to assess staffing, reduce overtime and burn out, and support long term correctional culture reform. He noted early success from pilot programs and highlighted that these reforms would improve safety, staff well-being and outcomes or incarcerated individuals.

Ed Hawthorne, President, Connecticut AFL-CIO: Testified in support of the bill, stating that the bill strengthens reporting, training, and accountability measures for correctional officers, helping improve safety and provide better tools for responding to sexual abuse incidents in correctional facilities.

Rachel Mirsky, Supervisory Attorney, Disability Rights Connecticut: Testified in support, emphasizing that the bill implements key reforms identified in a multi-year investigation, including improved surveillance, trauma-informed care, independent reporting mechanisms, and stronger accountability for DOC staff. She highlighted ongoing failures to protect incarcerated individuals, particularly those with disabilities, and stressed that the bill's safeguards are necessary to prevent continued sexual abuse.

NATURE AND SOURCES OF OPPOSITION:

Michael Adams, Legislative Assistant, Council 4 AFSCME: Opposed this bill. His testimony raised concerns about provisions related to employee liability, public disclosure of allegations, and due process protections, while supporting sections that relate to staffing analysis and workplace improvements.

**Reported by: Clerk- Greg Wolff
Assistant Clerk- Mike Hamann**

Date: 3/23/26