

Testimony of Susan Budlong Cole

November 27, 2007

Public Hearing: Judiciary Committee **RE: Criminal Justice Reform Proposals 1-15**

Chairman Lawler, Chairman McDonald, Members of the Judiciary Committee: My name is Susan Cole and following a 25 year career in substance abuse treatment, I have spent the last three years volunteering at York Correctional Institution.

In the current climate of outrage, it's easy to get tougher on crime -- I'm here today asking you to have the courage to get smarter, more creative. I'm here to ask you to consider alternatives to harsher penalties, longer sentences, reduced parole and probation time. I ask that you to not paint all offenders with the same broad brush. They are not all hardened criminals -- at least not yet. Three years at York have taught me that.

Here's just one example of a rehabilitation paradigm rather than a punishment one:

Jane Doe was convicted of Second degree larceny -- a Class C Felony -- and sentenced to 14 years for embezzling \$8,600 from her employer. She probably won't do fourteen years; maybe she spends ten years at York. Ten years at \$42,000 a year will cost you and me \$420,000. If you consider the 662 other inmates now serving time for larceny of varying degrees, we could be talking about 278 million dollars. Let's say, instead of ten years, Ms Doe spends 18 months to two years in prison; she spends a year at a half-way house and remains on probation until she has paid back the money she stole -- paid it back with interest. Total cost to taxpayer about \$100,000 instead of \$420,000, her victim is paid back and having returned to a constructive life Ms Doe is unlikely to re-offend.

It's true not all of 662 potential scenarios will have such a positive ending, but how many would it take to make a major dent in prison overcrowding, redirect corrections funding for rehabilitation programming, reduce recidivism, and free up prison cells for those violent criminals who belong in them. And that's just larceny; think about other non-violent crimes and how we might get creative: treatment alternatives for drug offenses, longer probation and parole rather than shorter -- return to the carrots and sticks of earned good time -- education and job training in prison.

We can get tougher on offenders or we can get smarter -- depends on what kind of a society we want to have here in Connecticut. A puritan culture that harshly punishes or an enlightened society that recognizes that we may not be able to rehabilitate them all but we can do a lot better than what we are doing and save a bundle along the way.

Thank you.