

Alicia Strong

Correction Advisory Committee Regarding Conditions of Confinement in Connecticut Prisons

Good evening members of the Correction Advisory Committee,

My name is **Alicia Strong**. I am the **co-founder of CT People's Survival Programs (CT-PSP)** and the **New Britain Racial Justice Coalition (NBRJC)**. Through this work—and **as someone who has had family members incarcerated in Connecticut prisons**—I have spent years in close relationships with **hundreds of currently and formerly incarcerated people and their families** across this state.

I submit this testimony to affirm that the conditions documented in the Office of the Correction Ombudsman's *2025 Conditions of Confinement Report* are not isolated incidents. They reflect **longstanding, systemic failures** that people inside Connecticut prisons have been reporting for years—often at great personal risk.

I am here not simply to summarize a report, but to **carry forward the voices of people who are living these conditions every day**, many of whom fear retaliation for speaking honestly.

One incarcerated person at MacDougall-Walker Correctional Institution described the internal culture this way:

“There is no real accountability inside these facilities. Complaints disappear, reports are rewritten, and people are punished for speaking up.”

This is not an abstract critique—it is a lived reality. Individuals consistently describe retaliation following grievances, including loss of privileges, transfers, disciplinary reports, and increased surveillance. When an institution is effectively responsible for investigating itself, people inside learn quickly that silence is safer than truth.

Healthcare neglect is among the most urgent and dangerous issues raised by incarcerated people and their families. One individual described seeking help during a medical emergency late at night:

“I felt like I was being treated as if I were an eight-year-old sent back to bed with a tummy ache.”

Despite worsening symptoms over several years and a family history of colon cancer, this individual shared:

“I am being forced to live in suffering and compromised health.”

These failures do not end at the prison gate. **People return home to Connecticut cities already carrying untreated medical conditions, trauma, and chronic illness**, placing enormous strain on families, community health systems, and municipal resources.

Environmental conditions inside Connecticut prisons further compound harm. At Osborn Correctional Institution, one incarcerated person described summer nights where the heat is so intense that:

“It feels like I’m being suffocated.”

Another reported:

“Rats run across our feet while we eat.”

Across multiple facilities, people consistently report:

- Persistent mold in showers, vents, and living areas
- Unsafe drinking water that smells or tastes foul
- Extreme heat in summer and insufficient heat in winter
- Only one electrical outlet shared between two people, creating fire hazards and conflict
- Months—and in some cases years—waiting for basic medical or dental care

As one incarcerated person summarized bluntly:

“The standard here is that there is no standard.”

These conditions **disproportionately impact people of color and residents of Connecticut’s urban centers**, including cities like New Britain, Hartford, New Haven, Bridgeport, and Waterbury—communities that already experience underinvestment in housing, healthcare, and employment opportunities.

When people return home from incarceration having endured unsafe conditions, untreated illness, and psychological harm, **the consequences are borne by entire neighborhoods**. Families are forced to provide unpaid care. Community clinics absorb untreated medical needs. Cities shoulder the costs of emergency services, housing instability, and reentry without adequate state support.

A mother whose son has been incarcerated in Connecticut for over 15 years shared:

“These are not just uncomfortable conditions. They are health hazards.”

She described extreme temperatures, chronic medical neglect, and the emotional toll of watching her loved one deteriorate while being powerless to intervene. She also spoke about losing precious minutes of already-limited visitation time due to broken equipment or understaffed facilities.

None of these conditions reflect rehabilitation. None reflect dignity. And none align with the stated mission of the Connecticut Department of Correction.

Incarceration should not mean exposure to unsafe living conditions, untreated illness, or retaliation for speaking out—**especially when the long-term impacts are concentrated in already overburdened communities of color.**

Oversight cannot be symbolic. Accountability **cannot be optional.** And human dignity **cannot stop at the prison gate.**

The people inside Connecticut's prisons are not asking for luxury. They are asking for:

- Timely and adequate medical care
- Safe, humane living conditions
- Protection from retaliation
- Independent, enforceable oversight

They are asking for a system that does not punish them for surviving—and for policies that recognize how prison conditions shape public health, racial equity, and community stability long after release.

I urge this Committee to take the Ombudsman's findings seriously, to center the lived experiences of incarcerated people and their families, and to move with urgency toward meaningful oversight, transparency, and reform.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this testimony and for your responsibility to ensure accountability within Connecticut's correctional system.

Respectfully submitted,

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