

Name: Barbara Fair

Title: Director

Organization or Agency: Stop Solitary Ct

Topic: Meeting Date Not Listed

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Testimony:

Good evening distinguished members of the Correctional Advisory Committee, Ombuds, Atty DeVaughn Ward and all who showed up for this very important hearing. My name is Barbara Fair and I am a member of Stop Solitary Ct and a licensed clinical social worker from West Haven. I would like to thank the ombuds, for his annual report on the deplorable conditions of confinement within Ct Dept of Corrections and the committee for this public hearing so community members and currently incarcerated people can be heard on this topic. First, I must say the report came as no surprise to me because I have been hearing stories for years about the conditions incarcerated people face. I heard about the mold, the lack of healthy ventilation, the non -working filthy showers with no privacy, the degrading strip searches even when people are visiting their loved ones remotely, the processed food that forces many to feed themselves from commissary, which in itself requires oversight. I heard from several facilities about mice and rats running around and how it was something they had to just adapt. I heard and actually experienced problems with video visiting. I received many reports on lockdowns that simply exploded once the PROTECT Act was passed into law. I heard countless times about the medical, dental and mental health staff who provide substandard to no treatment for ailments that after being ignored became major issues, some leading to preventable surgeries and death. It's always been heartbreaking to hear and frustrating because I couldn't do anything definitive to change things. I had conversations with many staff, including administrative staff about why it would be extremely difficult to hire and retain professional, compassionate, ethical people to work inside facilities under the current conditions, especially when custody took preference over medical or mental health need. I know too many people who worked there at one time and left because their ethics called for them to do no harm. The misdiagnosis and over medicating of people was something I knew I could not be a part of as a conscientious, ethical licensed clinical social worker. I also knew that mental illness was extremely high on the inside and the easy fix to control the people is to simply medicate them, many times over medicate them into submission, something I could not do as a professional and a human being. It's why when the PROTECT Act was passed and in the final hours medical oversight was tagged onto it, I was very upset. Upset because I knew medical neglect and malpractice was so high that it needed a separate ombuds office to concentrate solely on medical and mental health care. Legislators who are not knowledgeable about the height of the medical crisis within DOC went along with tagging medical under PROTECT Act. Sen Anwar, a doctor, knew medical and mental health needed its own ombuds, yet few listened. I knew attaching it under the umbrella of correctional oversight would leave medical and mental health in disarray and lives would continue to be lost. This month is the 3rd anniversary of my cousin's death from an aneurysm that went untreated until one day he simply dropped dead. A preventable death. A heartbreaking loss because he was serving a short sentence and would have been home by now. The 2024 deaths of two young men who overdosed on medication prescribed by a doctor who never saw them. It's criminal although the state's attorney refused to acknowledge it. I could probably write a book about the many deaths in custody of Ct DOC; preventable deaths. As I close, I want to make mention of what disappointed me about this report. I was looking for a report on Manson Youth and saw nothing. Because our young people are the most vulnerable in the system, I expected them to top the lists of concerns. State Child advocates reached out to the Dept of Justice, out of concern for their wellbeing. The visit led to a list of demands of Ct DOC. I was looking to see has anything changed since implementation and enforcement appears lax. I was shocked to hear about the officer who was working at Manson Youth being arrested for luring young girls online for sexual favors. How could this happen? Were children at risk? We don't know. Because DOJ is not on site and comes in from time to time, a regular check in from the ombuds is imperative. I'm not certain how much will change if someone is merely dropping in from time to time to fulfill reporting mandates. These young people are coming back

to our communities. If they are simply overmedicated and isolated, they will return home broken spiritually, mentally and physically, which means our communities will be unsafe and their ability to succeed in life will be drastically reduced. Another disappointment was there was no mention of the conditions within restricted housing where young people, predominately Black and Brown, are out of sight and severely isolated. I'm hoping to hear a report on those two groups in the near future. I'm hoping they will have the opportunity to speak with the ombuds so we are aware of the conditions they face. Thank you for this opportunity to be heard and hopefully we can hear about what's going on within facilities not mentioned in this report.