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Public Comment on the Correction Ombuds' Report

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Good evening, members of the Correction Advisory Committee. I would like to extend my thanks to the Office of the Correction Ombudsman for this report, and for speaking on behalf of people who are too often ignored, instead of given a way to make their experiences visible to the public and to those in power. Independent oversight is essential, and this report reflects both rigor and moral clarity.

My name is Christina Quaranta, and I'm the Executive Director of the Connecticut Justice Alliance. We work directly with young people who are currently in state custody, including inside Manson Youth Institution. As an organization, we insist on truth and transparency, and appreciate the work of the Correction Ombudsman in striving for both in this document.

What this report makes clear is that the system itself is under strain in ways that directly endanger children. When facilities are overstretched, under-resourced, or operating in environments not designed for youth, children are the ones who bear the consequences. That strain shows up as delayed or inadequate medical and mental health care, disrupted education, unsafe conditions, and the erosion of basic dignity.

The findings in this report align closely with what we hear directly from young people and with what we hear consistently from other advocacy organizations focused on youth impacted by the legal system.

We know from our work — and from the recent Department of Justice monitor's report — that many young people in state custody are not consistently receiving the services, education, and humane treatment they require and deserve. These are not optional supports. They are legal obligations and developmental necessities. When a system cannot reliably meet those obligations, it is not merely ineffective; it is harmful. The issues outlined in the Ombuds' report are either already present in youth facilities or are likely to emerge, posing significant danger and operational risk.

As conditions deteriorate for those inside facilities, we also must grapple with the compounding effects of system-wide failures. We are seeing corrections officers repeatedly put in harm's way, support staff inside facilities stretched thin to the point of being unable to handle critical tasks like medication adherence, recreation and study, and special education for children. The impact extends into communities, where family members share the burden and where those inside will return to continue their lives.

The prevailing model of incarceration continues to prioritize punishment over rehabilitation, and in doing so fails to deliver healing, accountability, or lasting public safety.

The solution here is not complicated, and respectfully, cannot be achieved through continuous government reports, only through courage and political will. This system is not built to meet children's needs. Keeping kids in their communities — with access to family, education, culturally competent services, and evidence-based supports — is more humane, more cost-effective, and more successful by every meaningful measure.

Connecticut already knows what works. Community-based diversion programs, youth service bureaus, restorative practices, credible messenger mentoring, and school-connected supports improve outcomes at a fraction of the cost of incarceration. Resources should be allocated accordingly — away from environments that cannot safely serve children and toward the community-based infrastructure that promotes accountability, healing, and long-term public safety. CTJA is working with experts to quantify the savings to taxpayers and improvement in outcomes, and encourages the legislative and judicial branches to do the same.

It is our uncompromising belief that incarcerating children is never the correct approach to helping them grow into healthy, responsible adults. But even for those who do not yet share that view, the evidence is clear: community-based approaches are safer, more effective, and more cost-efficient than incarceration.

This report should be treated as a call to action. Children cannot wait for incremental fixes to systems that are fundamentally misaligned with their needs. The state has both the knowledge and the responsibility to act differently—and to do so now.

Thank you for your time.