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Title:

Organization or Agency:

Topic: Meeting Date Not Listed

NA

Testimony:

Thank you so much for connecting. I have spoken with Jay Vazquez and Mark Ambrose about work with the New Britain Racial Justice Coalition. I've noticed that when our state legislature passes bills, they have a strong tendency to create carve outs where some benefit, while others are ineligible. Connecticut has one of the highest racial disparities in the country and these carve outs are one of the problems. I put together a quick summary for you to review.

Second, I've already written and mailed a letter concerning the ombudsman and conditions of confinement. One of the biggest problems I emphasized was the growing elderly population and their specific needs. Our current correctional system was and is not designed nor built to house and accommodate the needs of the elderly. Individuals 55 and over need access to specific housing and services, including but not limited to, single cells, automatic bottom bunks, specialized senior housing units, 24 hour in unit nursing stations, senior dietary menus etc. Well please let me know your thoughts about my following piece. In order to have a commission act, all they need is a written request from a state legislator.

Racial Disparity in Connecticut's Criminal Justice and Correctional Systems: Evaluation of the Role of Legislative "Carve Outs"

Several studies done by the Prison Policy Initiative have shown that the state of Connecticut has one of the highest racial disparities in regards to its criminal justice and correctional systems compared to the other states. Yet, at a cursory glance, Connecticut appears to be a progressive leader in racial diversity and equality. What accounts for this massive discrepancy between reality and ideals?

The answer is in two parts. Part 1, yes Connecticut does have some of the strongest laws in regards to identifying and addressing racial disparity. Part 2, but Connecticut does not use these laws. So, the state has the veneer of an ideal progressive state with regards to racial equity, but in reality, it is the complete opposite.

In regards to the Criminal Justice and Correctional Systems, there are numerous statutes designed to identify and eliminate racial disparity. Here are some examples:

Connecticut General Statute 51-10c Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparity in the Criminal Justice System.

subsection (4) Determine whether any statutory provision negatively impacts the racial and ethnic disparity in the state's criminal justice system and recommend statutory changes to the Governor and General Assembly to reduce such impact

Connecticut General Statute 19-133b Commission on Racial Equity in Public Health. Strategic plan re-elimination of health disparities and inequities

subsection (b) sub subsection (2) disparities in the criminal justice system

subsection (c) sub subsection (3) criminal justice indicators, including rates of involvement with the justice system

Connecticut General Statutes 2-24b Racial and ethnic impact statement required for certain bills and amendments

Thus there are numerous legal statutes available to review, identify and eliminate racial disparity in Connecticut's criminal justice and correctional systems. Yet, none of it is being utilized. Why?

One example is the political use of carve outs. Legislators continually pass laws that provide relief for some offenders, but make them ineligible for other more "unpopular" offenders. Although politically safe for their careers, it is most likely creating massive racial disparities in the systems. For example, do the carve outs/ineligibility for parole hearings (Connecticut General Statute 54-125a) create racial disparity? Does being ineligible to earn Risk Reduction Earned Credits (Connecticut General Statute 18-98e) create racial disparity? Do all those deemed ineligible for an earlier release suffer negative health consequences as a result of the lengthier times spent within the state's criminal justice and correctional systems? And does that have an impact on racial disparity? There are many state laws in place to obtain and address these answers. Yet, I suspect that many legislators would rather not want to know those answers, let alone address them.

Still, it is incumbent that we ask our state legislators to ask these questions and charge the commissions to investigate whether carve outs are creating racial disparity in our criminal justice and correctional systems. Only then, can we change them and provide true equality for everyone.