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Public Comment on the Office of the Correction Ombuds' 2025 Conditions of Confinement Report

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My name is Marc Donald, I serve as the CEO of Catalyst CT. Catalyst CT is a community-based organization rooted in Bridgeport, working across southwestern Connecticut. Our mission is to support young people and families through restorative justice programming that includes Youth Diversion Teams, court-based mediation, credible messenger violence prevention, and workforce development. Our work focuses on preventing justice system involvement, addressing the root causes of conflict and violence, and helping individuals build stable, healthy futures within their own communities.

I want to thank the Office of the Correction Ombuds for the release of the 2025 Conditions of Confinement Report and for the role it plays in providing independent oversight of Connecticut's correctional system. Reports like this are critical to understanding not just what is happening inside facilities, but how those conditions affect individuals, families, and communities across the state. When systems are under-resourced, understaffed, and operating without the ability to consistently meet basic needs, the impact is not contained to the facility. Those consequences show up in communities, in schools, and in families. This follows people well beyond incarceration. Staffing shortages, routine lockdowns, delayed medical and mental health care, and limited access to programming and services undermine stability and create long-term harm.

Many of the young people and adults we work with have experienced trauma, instability, and unmet mental health needs long before they ever come into contact with the justice system. When confinement environments compound those challenges instead of addressing them, it makes reentry harder and public safety outcomes worse. This is not just a corrections issue—it is a community health issue.

Catalyst CT's experience demonstrates unequivocally that effective, evidence-based alternatives to incarceration are both available and necessary. Community-based diversion, restorative justice practices, and credible messenger programs reduce justice system involvement, strengthen accountability, and deliver better outcomes at a fraction of the cost of incarceration. These approaches keep young people connected to education, families, and stabilizing supports while directly addressing the root causes of harm and conflict—advancing public safety and long-term community wellbeing.

The Conditions of Confinement Report should be taken seriously as both an assessment and a warning. It highlights the need for sustained oversight, adequate staffing, and basic standards of care for people who are currently incarcerated. At the same time, it reinforces the importance of investing upstream—into community-based infrastructure that prevents deeper system involvement in the first place.

Connecticut has strong community partners doing this work every day. With the right investment and policy support, we can reduce reliance on systems that are clearly under strain and build approaches that are safer, more effective, and more humane.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony and for your continued attention to these issues.

Respectfully submitted,
Marc Donald
President & CEO, Catalyst CT