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Title:

Organization or Agency:

Topic: Meeting Date Not Listed

NA

Testimony:

Good afternoon, Madam Chair, Mr. Chair, and members of the General Assembly.

I am here today not simply to discuss correctional policy—but to speak about responsibility.

Not just about systems—but about leadership.

And not just about incarceration—but about who we choose to be as a society.

The Office of the Correction Ombuds has delivered a clear and sobering message: Connecticut's correctional system is not experiencing isolated breakdowns. It is operating in a state of sustained, systemwide failure. And when failure becomes routine, accountability becomes optional.

Correctional staff are entrusted with statutory authority and guided by administrative rules meant to ensure safety, dignity, and lawful confinement. But when those rules are incomplete, inconsistently applied, or ignored without consequence—particularly when it comes to mental, emotional, and physical abuse—discretion fills the void. And unchecked discretion becomes unchecked power.

Justice Thurgood Marshall warned us of this danger when he said, “A rule without an effective remedy is useless.”

A rule without enforcement is not protection—it is permission.

Permission for neglect.

Permission for degradation.

Permission for harm.

The Ombudsman's report shows us what that permission looks like: predictable lockdowns used in place of staffing; delayed and denied medical and mental health care; unsanitary and degrading living conditions; restricted legal access; prolonged isolation. These are not accidents. They are outcomes—outcomes of choices made, and choices deferred.

And when incarcerated people seek redress, they encounter not resolution, but resistance. A grievance process layered with procedural hurdles, rigid timelines, and administrative complexity that discourages persistence and rewards exhaustion. Even when grievances are sustained, they too often result in technical victories without institutional change—as though revising a directive or training staff to follow it were simply too difficult.

I speak to this not only from the report, but from lived experience. I have personally filed hundreds of grievances and internal complaints seeking redress for documented harms—only to be met with reprisal, retaliation, and harsher conditions. When reporting harm invites punishment, the grievance process becomes a deterrent, not a remedy. Accountability without protection is not justice. It is suppression.

We must also confront a harder truth. When leadership allows these conditions to persist for decades, it reflects not a lack of knowledge, but a mindset—one shaped by the leadership chosen and empowered by this legislative body. Oversight that tolerates harm becomes complicit in its continuation.

And we must remember who lives under these conditions. The people in our prisons are our family members, our friends, our neighbors, our fellow citizens. We are no better than our worst mistakes—and no less than our capacity to learn from them. Prison is the punishment imposed by the court. It is not a

license for additional punishment by the institution.

No agency, no employee, and no system has the authority to decide how much institutional harm is acceptable.

This is not an indictment of every correctional professional. Many serve with dedication under extraordinary strain. But dedication cannot replace enforceable standards. Good intentions cannot substitute for accountability. And silence cannot stand where leadership is required.

The question before us is not whether these conditions exist. The report answers that. The question is whether we will act.

Because order without humanity is not justice.

Control without care is not safety.

And a system without accountability is not worthy of public trust.

Thank you.