

Testimony for the Correction Advisory Committee Public Meeting

Good evening. My name is Tracy Shumaker, and thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

I am here not only as an advocate or a professional working in reentry, but as someone who lived inside Connecticut's correctional system for nearly two decades. I was incarcerated at the age of 28 and served over 19 years before being released in June of 2022. What I share today comes from lived experience—experience that continues to shape my life, my family, and my work in the community.

I am wearing maroon today intentionally. Maroon is the color worn by the women incarcerated at York Correctional Institution. I chose to wear it in solidarity—and as a reminder that while I am standing here free, thousands of women remain inside conditions that are too often ignored or minimized.

Just as I made a choice to wear this color, the Department of Correction has made choices—over many years—to ignore the visible deterioration of both the physical prison and the mental health and medical care inside it. The crumbling infrastructure, untreated trauma, and lack of consistent care are not accidents. They are the result of long-standing neglect.

Conditions of confinement are not abstract. They are not just lines in a report. They are the daily realities that determine whether someone leaves prison more traumatized or more prepared to return home. I experienced both harm and healing inside DOC facilities—often at the same time.

I witnessed overcrowding, inadequate medical care, and prolonged isolation that stripped women of dignity and hope. I also saw women actively trying to better themselves—only to be blocked. Women missed school, therapy, and group programming not because they refused, but because doors were not opened.

I saw officers refuse to put down their phones to open doors so women could attend class or group. Buzzers were turned off. Requests were ignored. Women were told “no” or “you’re too late,” even when the delay was not their fault. Instead of support, rooms were searched and

destroyed. These practices undermine rehabilitation and send a clear message that control matters more than growth.

These conditions do not stay behind prison walls. They follow people home. They show up in untreated trauma, barriers to reentry, and fractured trust—affecting families, communities, and public safety.

At the same time, I also know what works. While incarcerated, I participated in college programs, restorative justice initiatives, and peer-led groups. Those opportunities saved my life. But access to them was inconsistent and often felt like luck instead of policy.

I am also a mother. My children grew up with their mother behind bars. The generational impact of incarceration is real, and it must be taken seriously.

That is why this committee's work matters. Oversight matters. Transparency matters. And lived experience must be treated as expertise.

I urge you to prioritize humane conditions, access to healthcare, meaningful programming, and real accountability. When we invest in dignity, we invest in safer communities.

Thank you for listening—and for the opportunity to speak.