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Testimony before the Appropriations Committee Re:

RE-ENTRY INFORMATIONAL FORUM: MARCH 24, 2009

Julia Wilcox, Policy Specialist, Connecticut Association of Nonprofits (CT Nonprofits)

Good afternoon, Senator Harp, Senator Handley, Representative Geragosian, Representative McCrory and distinguished members of the Appropriations Subcommittee. I appreciate the opportunity to speak before you today. My name is Julia Wilcox, Policy Specialist for the Connecticut Association of Nonprofits (CT Nonprofits.) CT Nonprofits is a membership organization that represents more than 530 nonprofit agencies. Approximately 300 of our member agencies contract with State government for a variety of human and social services. The following information is presented on behalf of the Community Justice and Juvenile Justice Divisions which contract with DOC & Judicial / CSSD.

COMMUNITY-BASED OFFENDER RE-ENTRY SERVICES:

We commend Representative McCrory and the Committee for your efforts to develop this Forum. As the testimony proceeds this afternoon, you will have the opportunity to hear first hand, from the Nonprofit Provider Community who represent a broad spectrum of expertise and unique approaches to the offender re-entry programs they provide to every community in the state. In addition, you will hear from many individuals: ex-offenders, families, and others, whose lives have been forever changed through the benefits of the re-entry process. During some recent Legislative Subcommittee meetings, there has been some discussion regarding a presumption that community programs represent a 'cookie-cutter' approach to services. It is our belief that many if not most of today's presenters, will offer a clear perspective of the unique qualities of the programs offered throughout the state. As discussions continue, it is important to note that while there will always be ways to improve upon the system, and barriers to overcome, according to national studies, Connecticut is considered to be a 'model' in terms of the state approach which supports successful community reintegration.

For years, nonprofit providers have come before you and testified in favor of expanding treatment programs and alternatives to incarceration. In these fiscally challenging times, this strategy is not only best for the populations directly served through the criminal justice system, but for the state of Connecticut – as an extensive cost savings measure, which not only increases public safety, but strengthens the very fabric of our communities. As you continue your efforts to address the state budget crisis, it is essential to view the support of community-based, re-entry services (as provided by the nonprofit provider network) not as an 'expense,' but rather, an 'investment' in human capital and the welfare of our state.

We implore the Legislature to fully utilize the willingness, capacity and quality afforded to the state by the nonprofit community which partners with the state on a daily basis. Nonprofit Community Justice Providers afford the State of Connecticut a broad scope of extremely high quality services, at an ongoing, cost-savings to the state. With relation specifically to the Criminal Justice System, programs include both residential and nonresidential services, Alternatives to Incarceration, Halfway House Programs, Substance Abuse and Behavioral Health Treatment Programs, assistance in the areas of Domestic Violence, adult education and vocation – to name just a few. In addition, and of critical importance, programs also exist to provide assistance to the children and families of individuals involved in this complicated cycle. Our member agencies create opportunities for positive change by promoting and supporting the full potential of individuals, the strength of families, and the well being of the communities of Connecticut.

STATISTICS IN SUPPORT OF RE-ENTRY

Most offenders who enter prison will eventually return to a community. In Connecticut, more than 95% of prison inmates leave the prison system and re-enter society. As you are no doubt aware, statistics universally support the significant correlation between supervised, community re-entry services, and a reduction in recidivism.

Most recently, The 2009 Connecticut Annual Recidivism Study: (Criminal Justice Policy and Planning Division) indicates that community supervision programs such parole or transitional supervision (TS), had the lowest recidivism rates among all groups of offenders in their study. While 36.7% of all offenders were re-incarcerated for new offenses within 3 years of release, 27.4% of TS completers and 23.4% of parole completers were returned to prison for new offenses.

The significance and value of community-based services becomes even more clearly defined, when the cost savings to the state are factored in as follows:

- ⇒ Average annual cost per inmate – DOC/Prison Facilities = \$31,000-\$64,000
- ⇒ Average annual cost per offender - community residential treatment programs = \$22,000.

THE HUMAN ELEMENT

These statistics illustrate only the ‘functional’ cost savings. They do not begin to reflect the savings in terms of ‘human capital,’ or the effect that the reduction in recidivism has upon the families and communities of our state.

To this end, it is critical for the citizens of Connecticut to understand that supervised re-entry into their communities – and NOT a system of extended incarceration, is critical to increasing public safety, by ending the cycle of recidivism and strengthening and healing these families in crisis.

BARRIERS:

BARRIERS: As discussions continue, it is critical to take a realistic and thoughtful approach to addressing the proven barriers to successful community reintegration including the following:

- ⇒ SITING: Siting of Programs in the Community (Refer to CT Nonprofits’ Presentation to the Siting Incentives Committee 10/23/08)
- ⇒ HOUSING: Affordable, approved housing in an appropriate, community setting, with access for family members
- ⇒ EMPLOYMENT: Appropriate, sustainable employment
- ⇒ EDUCATION: Appropriate, ongoing education – both within the DOC / CSSD systems, and ongoing following release.
- ⇒ COMMUNITY EDUCATION: Responsible and ongoing efforts to educate the public related to the value of re-entry process.
- ⇒ OFFENDER ‘LABELS:’ Which ‘shut down’ dialogue and discourage progress and consideration.

INCENTIVES / REINSTATEMENT OF RE-ENTRY FURLOUGHS:

Legislation is proposed to reinstate and expand the Commissioner of Correction's authority to place inmates on re-entry furlough for up to 45 days. The re-entry furlough will provide accountability, support and aftercare services AND INCENTIVES to offenders being released from correctional facilities for a period of approved community supervision. Offenders must have an approved community sponsor, demonstrated responsible behavior while incarcerated and an assessed need for transitional services. This program had a successful completion rate of 97% in the past and was the most successful discretionary program available to the incarcerated population. Evidence based research clearly demonstrates that a period of community supervision and targeted interventions lowers the risk of recidivism. We strongly recommend the support of this initiative, as a critical part of the re-entry process, with proven results.

PREVENTION: JUVENILE JUSTICE SERVICES:

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE RAISE THE AGE INITIATIVE: It is impossible to discuss the re-entry process for the adult population, in the absence of consideration for the need to divert our juvenile populations from entering the system at large. The Juvenile Jurisdiction change was scheduled to go into effect January 1, 2010. This important initiative will significantly alter the existing juvenile courts by potentially doubling the number of juveniles that these courts currently handle. In light of the state's economic condition and the continuing effort to finalize the implementation plan, the Governor is proposing that this initiative be delayed for two years with a new effect date of January 1, 2012. We would implore the Legislature to do everything in your power, to assure that the critical progress and momentum that has been made in this area, is not lost due to short-sighted 'cost savings.' In reality, delay in the implementation of the RTA Initiative, will end up costing the state dearly – in both the dollars that will be necessary to address the increase in unmet needs of the juvenile population, and the 'loss' in terms of delayed progress for the individual youth and families involved.

MOVING FORWARD:

In closing, I would encourage you to review the related reference materials, indicated on the final page of this testimony. In addition, we urge you to contact providers within your local communities. The ability of the state of CT to adequately meet the needs of its residents is greatly dependent upon the ability of the Private Provider Community to sustain a vibrant network, which will continue to serve as the ultimate safety net for Connecticut's citizens at risk.

I thank you for your time and consideration of these critically important issues. I would be pleased to answer any questions at this time.



Related Reference Materials: Connecticut Statistics:

- ⇒ For information related to DOC funded programs of the private provider network available within your communities, please refer to the following:

Directory of Contracted Community Programs: Connecticut Department of Correction - Parole and Community Services, Theresa C. Lantz, Commissioner, Randy Braren, Director of Parole and Community Services, Lawrence P. Mayer, Director of Programs and Services (July 2008)

<http://www.ct.gov/doc/lib/doc/pdf/contractedcommprogdirectory.pdf>

- ⇒ 2009 Connecticut Recidivism Study: Annual report published in response to the statutory requirements outlined in Public Act 05-249. The legislation created the Criminal Justice Policy and Planning Division (CJPPD) within the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) and tasked the Division with issuing an annual report on the recidivism of offenders released from the custody of the Department of Correction (DOC) and from probation. (February 2009)

http://www.ct.gov/opm/lib/opm/cjppd/cjresearch/recidivismstudy/20090215_recidivismstudy.pdf

- ⇒ 2008 Annual Report: 1968 -2008, Connecticut Department of Correction

<http://www.ct.gov/doc/lib/doc/PDF/PDFReport/annualreport2008.pdf>

- ⇒ Juvenile Jurisdiction Policy and Operations Coordinating Council: <http://www.housedems.ct.gov/jjpoc/index.asp>

Related Reference Materials: National Statistics:

- ⇒ One in 31: The Long Reach of American Corrections: Pew Center on the States, Washington, DC: The Pew Charitable Trusts (March 2009).

http://www.pewcenteronthestates.org/uploadedFiles/PSPP_1in31_report_FINAL_WEB_2-27-09.pdf

The Pew Center on the States identifies and advances effective policy approaches to critical issues facing states. In 2006, the Pew Center on the States launched the Public Safety Performance Project (PSPP) to help states advance fiscally sound, data-driven policies and practices in sentencing and corrections that protect public safety, hold offenders accountable, and control corrections costs.

Explosive growth in the number of people on probation or parole has propelled the population of the American corrections system to more than 7.3 million, or 1 in every 31 U.S. adults, according to a report released by the Pew Center on the States. The vast majority of these offenders live in the community, yet new data in the report finds that nearly 90 percent of state corrections dollars are spent on prisons. [One in 31: The Long Reach of American Corrections](#) examines the scale and cost of prison, jail, probation and parole in each of the 50 states, and provides a blueprint for states to cut both crime and spending by reallocating prison expenses to fund stronger supervision of the large number of offenders in the community.

For additional information, Please do not hesitate to contact:

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