



DATE: March 4, 2021

TO: Housing Committee

FROM: Julia Wilcox, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy, The Alliance

RE: S.B. 875: An Act Concerning the Risk of Homelessness for Those Released from the Custody of the Department of Correction – Support

Good Morning Senator Lopes, Representative McGee, Senator Cicarella, Representative Polletta, and distinguished members of the Housing Committee:

My name is Julia Wilcox, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy at the CT Community Nonprofit Alliance (The Alliance). The Alliance is the statewide organization representing the nonprofit sector. Community nonprofits provide essential services to over half a million individuals and families in Connecticut every year, and employ 14% of Connecticut's workforce, improving the quality of life in communities across the State.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony in support of S.B. 875, "An Act Concerning the Risk of Homelessness for Those Released from the Custody of the Department of Correction." This bill would require the Department of Correction (DOC) to assess the risk of homelessness for incarcerated persons released from its custody, to create a program to avoid potential homelessness and to require reporting to measure homelessness in real-time.

We are concerned about the extensive numbers of people who are being discharged into homelessness following release from incarceration. The correlation between homelessness and involvement in the criminal justice system is well documented. In March 2019, the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness (CCEH) provided the Office of Policy and Management (OPM) with three years of data (Jan 1, 2016 to Jan 1, 2019) from the Homeless Management Information System, to cross match with the state's criminal justice databases. The findings reinforce that formerly incarcerated people are likely to wind up experiencing homelessness:

- 8,187 (48%) people who utilized shelters between 2016 to 2019 had a DOC criminal record.
- 3,562 (21%) people who utilized shelters within 2016 to 2019 were also released from DOC within the same time frame.

Addressing the impact of this intersection between homelessness and involvement in the criminal justice system involves the services of nonprofits. Community Justice providers support justice-involved individuals and their families, as well as survivors of crime. These programs, funded by the Department of Correction and the Court Support Services Division of the Judicial Branch, continue to play an essential role in the ongoing success related to criminal justice reform in Connecticut.

Our members that provide services related to housing and homelessness, funded by the Department of Housing, assist individuals and families experiencing homelessness to improve their life situations by providing temporary and long-term housing, and an array of clinical and supportive services. These nonprofit organizations serve on the front lines of reentry, and provide critical support to individuals, families, and communities across Connecticut.

According to the January 2021 [OPM Monthly Indicators Report](#), community providers are serving approximately 4,000 people in programs which are funded by DOC – a greater than 30% increase from 2014. Thousands more receive services through providers that contract with the Court Support Services Division (CSSD) of the Judicial Branch.

Over the past five years, while the prison population has fallen dramatically, demand for community services for people involved in the justice system has increased. While these demands have increased over time, funding has been cut by nearly 15%, or \$5.8 million (with no increase in the proposed budget for FY2022-2023). Throughout the pandemic, nonprofit providers have played essential roles in the ability of the DOC, CSSD, and DOH to safely and securely manage the justice-involved population. They have worked tirelessly with their state agency partners, to continue to manage the programmatic needs, as well as the Covid-related healthcare needs of both clients and staff.

The Alliance supports the concepts and recommendations presented in S.B. 875, including:

- Screen all inmates for housing needs and homelessness risk as part of their Department of Corrections reentry plan to provide early identification of people who are likely to have challenges identifying a suitable home plan or sponsor. CSSD currently utilizes a similar screening process.
- Create and fund a new program within Department of Correction to contract with community-based nonprofit organizations to provide housing search and navigation, housing application assistance, and short-term rental assistance for people eligible for release from Department of Correction, but who lack stable housing or a sponsor.
- Ensure that DOC is held accountable for addressing housing needs among inmates eligible for release and ensuring that the timely release of inmates is not hindered by the lack of housing options.

In closing, for people who are under parole or probation supervision, homelessness can make it difficult to comply with the terms of supervision. For this population, the circumstances lead to technical violations and/or revocations of parole or probation and more time spent in prison. In response to these issues, we commend CSSD for their recent efforts to include a focus on preventing and addressing homelessness among probationers as follows:

- Screening and tracking homelessness and housing status among probationers.
- Tracking and reporting on the impact of this program on reducing recidivism among probationers.

Thank you for your consideration of these important issues.

Julia Z. Wilcox, Manager of Advocacy & Public Policy

JWilcox@ctnonprofitalliance.org