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March 22, 2021
SEIU District 1199 New England
Before the Judiciary Committee

In Support of SB 1059: AN ACT CONCERNING THE CORRECTION ACCOUNTABILITY COMMISSION, THE OFFICE OF THE CORRECTION OMBUDS, THE USE OF ISOLATED CONFINEMENT, SECLUSION AND RESTRAINTS, SOCIAL CONTACTS FOR INCARCERATED PERSONS AND TRAINING AND WORKERS' COMPENSATION BENEFITS FOR CORRECTION OFFICERS.

Good Afternoon Senator Winfield, Representative Stafstrom, and members of the Judiciary Committee. The New England Healthcare Employees Union District 1199 represents 26,000 members across Connecticut in a variety of private and public direct healthcare settings, including 7,000 health care workers at state agencies. This includes all 600 front line health care workers in the Connecticut Department of Corrections. Our members are doctors, nurses, psychiatrists, social workers, and other health care professionals who care for a population with acute medical and mental health illnesses. Our members must uphold a constitutional mandate to treat and rehabilitate these individuals while they serve their sentences. Today, we are here to testify in support of Senate Bill 1059.

Our members see the negative impacts solitary confinement has on incarcerated individuals firsthand. For people in solitary confinement the endless monotony and lack of human interaction can quickly lead to serious psychological conditions. Our members can attest that those placed in solitary confinement often experience anxiety, depression, and problems sleeping, or in more severe instances a complete descent into madness. These conditions plague incarcerated individuals not only during their incarceration but as they attempt to reenter and reintegrate themselves into society. It is for this reason we fully endorse the concept of SB 1059. This bill would end the practice of solitary confinement as it exists today. It would mandate that incarcerated individuals have additional time outside of their cells and facilitate the human and social interaction that we know is so critical for our mental health.

Another element of this bill that we fully endorse is the additional training and benefits for prison staff. Our only concern is the vague nature of the language in the bill's current form. We would like to see more specific language ensuring that healthcare staff in Connecticut's DOC would also receive additional training and benefits, and not just correctional officers.

The United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world.¹ In Connecticut we have a choice to make. Are we going to continue to allow the suffering of human beings or are we going to make a *real change* in DOC — by eliminating solitary confinement, expanding human and social interaction in prisons, and producing healthier communities for all of us? Just like 1199 health care workers aim to prevent rather than react to emergencies—it’s time for Connecticut to take action *now* in following through on its progressive vision to be a force for racial justice. We must pass Senate Bill 1059 now!

Thank you for your time.

¹ “Highest to Lowest - Prison Population Rate.” *Norway / World Prison Brief*, www.prisonstudies.org/highest-to-lowest/prison_population_rate?field_region_taxonomy_tid=All.