

Good afternoon members of the Correction Advisory Committee,

My name is Alex Brown. I am a macro social worker, advocate, and formerly incarcerated woman. I spent nearly five years incarcerated at York Correctional Institution.

Before I begin, I want to ask every member of this Committee to watch the video of J'Allen Jones' death. Watch every minute, without looking away. If we're serious about oversight, we have to be willing to witness what happens inside our prisons.

Today, I want to use my time to amplify the voice of a woman who is currently incarcerated at York Correctional Institution. I want you to hear directly from someone who is living in these conditions today. With her permission, I'll be reading parts from testimony she prepared for this Committee.

She begins:

"I am currently incarcerated, which means I see, experience, and fight to survive the effects of trauma every day... Those of us referred to as the 'offenders' often offend because of untreated trauma... Make no mistake: incarceration is extremely traumatizing."

She describes daily life inside York:

"Incarcerated people are forced to live in a hypervigilant state... The feared danger comes from both directions, peers and staff."

"The correctional officers also keep us in this very damaging hypervigilant state. Male officers, for example, will often flip their handcuffs or jingle their keys around when touring the unit—a signal to women that a man is 'on the tier.' For us, because these items are used when taking us to segregation or worse, the mental health unit, it is an automatic cortisol surge... Daily, the threat of random and overused full cavity strip searches, unannounced room searches where contraband is not found, but is sometimes planted, and the use of segregation as punishment for subjective infractions is business as usual. The bottom line is we NEVER feel safe."

When she writes about mental health care, she describes what women inside call a "drive by diagnosis."

"Everyone receives a ten minute intake interview... It can take up to thirty days to be seen by a psychologist, for what we refer to here as 'a drive by diagnosis.' We call it that because no substantive evaluation takes place... Instead, after listing our symptoms, the preferred course of action is chemical treatment. If a resident is on medication, her assigned social worker is required to see her only once per month for fifteen minutes. That is the extent of the 'therapy' provided in this facility. No trauma treatment!"

She later writes:

"I do not take medication... I do not qualify for that fifteen minute check-in, even after the unimaginable death of my son. I received that devastating news in the presence of a social worker who stayed with me for about ten minutes. NO follow up."

In another statement, she shares what happened after seeking treatment for pain in her mouth:

"For over a year I was told 'the dentist had been notified and I was on a wait list.'... That's when I learned the truth—the dentist had never been notified. The dental team got me in, removed the molar, and discovered there was a mass... They ordered a biopsy which revealed it was cancer."

She describes recovering from surgery in an infirmary where the call intercoms were disabled, there were no safety bars in the showers, and staff said the repair order had been sitting for over a year. Despite an ADA accommodation for private transportation to the hospital, she was later placed in a holding cell with new admissions, forcing her to delay critical follow-up care. She developed an infection and later learned her cancer had become invasive and aggressive.

She asks this Committee:

"If someone like me can fall through the enormous cracks here, what chance do the masses have?"

And she ends her testimony with these words:

"We need to make change. It's long overdue."

These are not stories from the past. They are the lived reality of a woman who is still incarcerated at York today. I hope her words stay with you as you continue your oversight of Connecticut's correctional system.

Thank you

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