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Title:

Organization or Agency:

Topic: Meeting Date Not Listed

NA

Testimony:

Correction Advisory Committee,

re: The Elder Crisis

The 1990's heralded "Tough on Crime" politics and the complete and utter focus upon retribution within Connecticut's criminal justice and correctional systems. A collateral consequence of those decisions is the current elder crisis unfolding within the Department of Correction. By focusing primarily upon retribution, sentences became significantly longer and the conditions in which they were served became significantly harsher. As a result, prisoners exposed to these factors age much quicker, suffer from more age related illnesses (i.e. diabetes, hypertension, cardiac disease, cancer and dementia), and have a shorter overall life expectancy compared to those in the general public. Retribution is effectively designed to erode and grind down a person bit by bit, and piece by piece.

I have been incarcerated for over 24 years. Currently, I have been working as a janitor in a prison medical ward for close to 7 years. I have had a front row seat to the ravages of the retributive policies. There is the crippling debilitation of arthritis permanently consigning those to walkers and wheelchairs. The enduring endless hours tethered to dialysis in order to live. The slow withered wasting and ruination of the cancer diagnosis. And now, there is the growing numbers of prisoners afflicted with the diagnosis of dementia. I have personally watched people I've known for decades slowly lose their minds and personalities. They have faded away into absolute nothingness. Just the other day, I watched an individual pack up all his personal belongings and stand in front of his window for hours waiting for a bus to pick him up. Waiting for a bus that will never come, because he no longer knows where he is.

In the book Harm in American Penology: Offenders, Victims and Their Communities, the author Todd Clear argues that strict retributivism does not account for change. What greater change could there be when the ravages of age and disease have robbed a person of their mind? Retribution at this point, becomes torture.

It is my sincere hope that the committee considers a mechanism to release older offenders who have spent decades in a retributive system. That would allow them the basic human dignity to receive proper medical and senior care needs in the community, and not just the bare minimum standards protected by the 8th Amendment of our Constitution.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

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