

To the esteemed Members of the Correction Advisory Committee,

My name is Sharief Nasheed, and I am an inmate housed at Cheshire Correctional Institution, where I have been housed here for close to two decades.

I am a college student partaking in classes at both Middlesex Community College and Wesleyan University. If God wills, I will attain my associate's degree after the fall semester, with plans to move forward and earn my bachelor's degree. I am a certified mentor who worked with the 18–25-year-old segment of the population within the youthfully nationally recognized T.R.U.E. program. Unfortunately, due to concerns about significant health challenges for my mother, and my own worsening physical health challenges, I made the very difficult choice to step away from the program.

I'm also one of the co-founders of another progressive unit called the H.O.N.O.R. unit, designed for the enrichment of the older segment of the population with programming that focuses on self-care, reflecting and taking accountability, shifting mindsets and making better decisions.

My current journey started with a forty-year sentence for robbery, and I have been determined to make the best use of this time. Because of these efforts and a strong external support system, I was granted a modification of the original sentence — reduced from 40 to 27 years.

The judge who reduced my sentence referred to me as a model inmate for my choices I made to better myself and cited the impact my efforts had on others while incarcerated. I was and am truly grateful to the judge who recognized that I took accountability and actively sought ways to change.

I started this testimony listing accomplishments with the purpose of demonstrating the duality of being in DOC custody – I have been able to utilize and benefit from opportunities to better myself and prepare me for eventual release to be a better steward of my time and opportunities; and even with the things I've been able to achieve, I find myself having to navigate the vast challenges of what it is to be in need of services and support, and meeting only trauma and mistreatment at the hands of medical and other staff.

Those of us who live with chronic health conditions have extremely limited access to healthier food options inside the facility and through commissary (and these options are exorbitantly priced). Recreational opportunities, both inside and outside, foster a fishbowl experience and promote more sedentary lifestyles (further exacerbating chronic health problems). Conditions in visiting rooms that prohibit connection to our families – our lifelines – are also cause for concern.

What is perhaps most jarring for me is the care, or lack thereof, relative to health concerns of those of us in custody. Our prisons are not housing a mentally healthy population. More than half of people in state correctional facilities are living with a mental health problem. That reality should make humane treatment and appropriate mental health care the minimum standard—not an afterthought. When people enter prison carrying trauma, depression, anxiety, or serious mental

illness, conditions that compound those struggles don't produce rehabilitation; they deepen harm.

Accessing opportunities and achieving goals many of us never imagined possible are not enough to spare us the deliberate indifference, neglect, taunts and dehumanization. The lack of accountability – the cruelty cradled lovingly by impunity – exacerbates our physical and mental health issues. And in this carceral culture, we are forced to traverse a gauntlet which produces mistrust and fear and, if we advocate for ourselves, retaliation by staff who disregard our humanity and have written us off as unredeemable.

I live with and suffer from several severe health issues including Autoimmune hepatitis, Type 2 Diabetes, and face daily battles with neurological and chronic orthopedic issues. During this period of incarceration and despite my ongoing (worsening) health conditions:

- I have been denied transportation to specialty appointments because of lack of ADA accommodation by facility staff because I wear several braces ordered by specialists.
- I have been harassed by officers behind my health issues and retaliated against after attempting to respectfully advocate for myself and for fair treatment. One of the most recent examples, on July 11th, because of my orthopedic health issues I was bedridden for days by an on-call doctor. Throughout the weekend my medication was brought to my cell however, I suddenly (and without explanation) was refused the same courtesy on July 13th & 14th.

On the 13th and 14th, my sole recourse was to slide on my belly across the floor in front of medical staff and officers, where I was handed my medications, after which I slid back to my cell on my stomach. The indifference was staggering; and the humiliation because of this dehumanization was overwhelming – and it should all be on camera. On the 14th a medical code was called, and I was given a wheelchair by another on-call doctor (whilst still being denied provider-ordered transportation to a hospital).

As it relates to health care within the department there is no culture of care here. Private medical matters are often discussed in a way that calls HIPAA compliance into question. What is worse is the lack of humane care, refusal to adhere to treatment plans and courtesies that would create pathways to healing, an absence of accountability across supposed systems of care and an outright denial of our humanity because we are incarcerated will lead to increased and avoidable morbidity and mortality. We are being failed by the Department of Corrections. We were already sentenced and endure unwritten punitive measures at the hands of medical and custodial staffers who act with impunity as they carelessly toy with our health – our very lives.

Once released, as I assemble my care team for my various physical health issues, I will also pursue mental health treatment to help me process the trauma endured during this period of incarceration. Being away from my family has been challenging enough – dealing with life-threatening health issues while trying to better myself and being mistreated by people who do not view me as being worthy of humane care only added to the growing need for mental health treatment and counseling (once I am able to leave the facility). I have been shown that my ongoing

and worsening health conditions are of no consequence to anyone in this facility – the evidence I continue to collect leads me to the conclusion that the bulk of the people with direct connection to my ability to access equitable care are not to be trusted. I cannot, therefore, trust any of them with my mental health – asking for help can lead to a period of solitary confinement.

We are aware that our poor choices and actions landed us in a carceral setting and we are serving our time – many of us setting and accomplishing goals we may have never thought possible before. Some of us will be afforded the opportunity to return to our communities and make amends, continuing our pathways to redemption – this is my plan, if God wills the modification and release to come to fruition. That said, we should not have to return to our families and communities literally broken. Our being in custody does not mean corrections staff should intentionally mistreat us, retaliate against us when we use our grievance processes, and subject us to conditions that exacerbate our deteriorating health. It feels like a sentence on top of a sentence – a secret pact to break us – simply because they can.

By speaking out today, I am aware that the target on my back has been amplified – and I expect retaliation for speaking out to be swift and devastating. The number of people involved in the denial of my humanity and proper medical care is likely to increase, but the cost of silence could be a swift decline of my health – or worse.

It is my hope and prayer that you will **hear** us today – and **believe** us. We acknowledge our past actions and the harm we caused. I am merely asking for the chance to return to my family and community with dignity, a measure of my health and the drive to care for the community I once disregarded. Change is possible – I am a living example. Course correction is possible – within the confines of the Department of Corrections.

It is my fervent hope that all staff will live up to this excerpt from the “About Us” section of the Department’s website:

“The Department endeavors to provide the programming, education and treatment which willing inmates may utilize to improve themselves and the success of their eventual reintegration into society. Our staff of dedicated correctional professionals takes great PRIDE (Professionalism, Respect, Integrity, Dignity, Excellence) in the daily performance of their duty to our state.”

With gratitude for your time and consideration,
Sharief Talib Nasheed (217833)